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REASONABLE FAITH.

SHORT ESSAYS FOR THE TIMES.

BY

THREE "FRIENDS".

English

REVISED EDITION.

MACMILLAN & CO.

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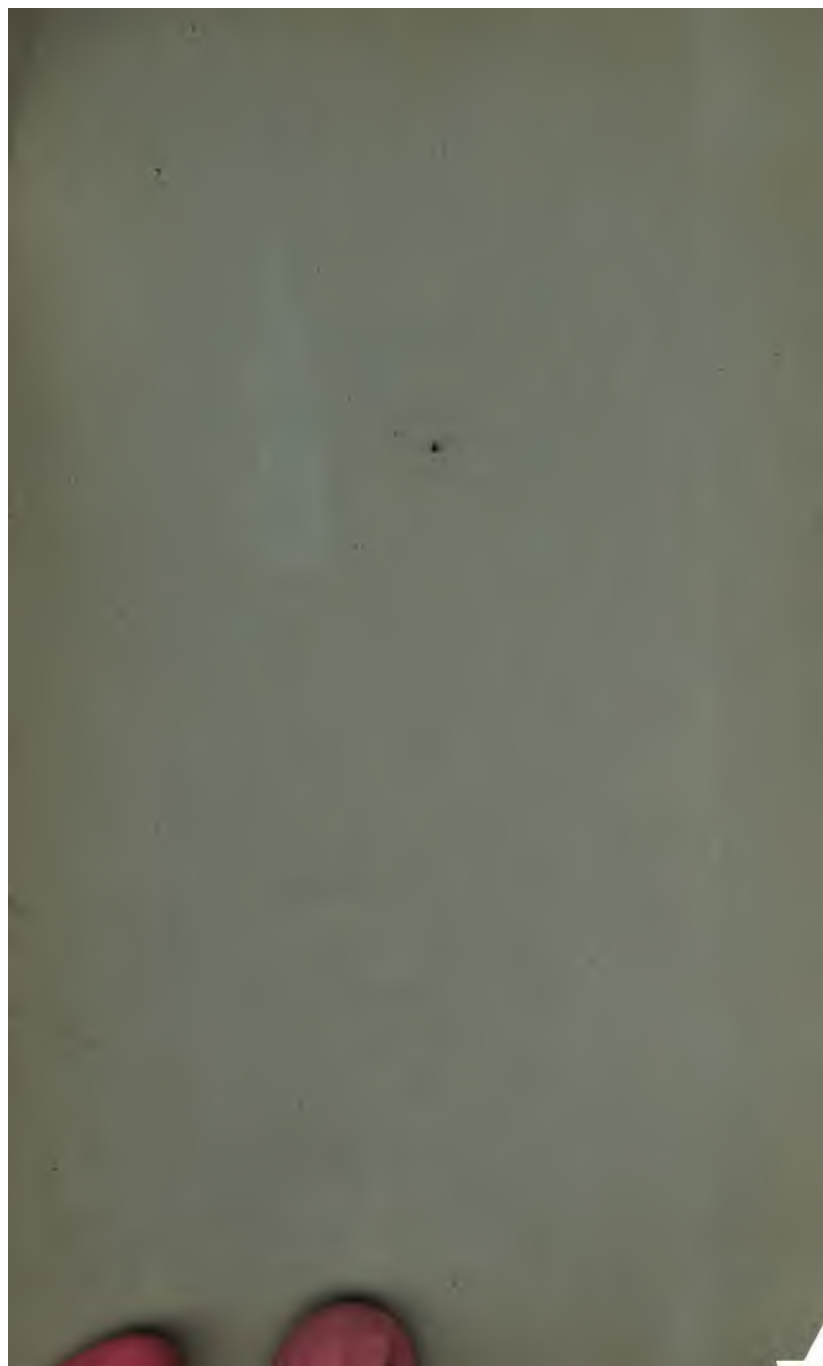
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A REASONABLE FAITH.

*SHORT RELIGIOUS ESSAYS*

*FOR THE TIMES.*





# A REASONABLE FAITH.

*SHORT RELIGIOUS ESSAYS*

*FOR THE TIMES.*

BY

THREE "FRIENDS."

"We must be on our guard against identifying with the truth of Scripture that which has become a current or popular notion. To do so would be to give a lamentable application to the famous adage, *Vox populi, vox Dei.*"—E. DE PRESSENSÉ.

*REVISED EDITION.*

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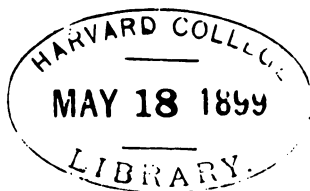
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RICHARD CLAY AND SONS,  
BREAD STREET HILL, LONDON, E.C.  
*And Bungay, Suffolk.*

*I would much rather risk a trembling word  
In honest zeal for holy Truth and Right,  
Though in the Trial I should suffer loss,  
Wherein I built not what will stand the fire ;—  
Rather than dare the heavier risk,—to know  
Something perhaps of God that others miss,  
And hide it in my soul, and seal my lips  
Through slavish fear. For God is merciful  
To such as bring Him all their hearts can hold  
Of pure intent, and reverence, and love.*



## PREFACE TO THE REVISED EDITION.

IN issuing a revised edition of *A Reasonable Faith*, we have gratefully to acknowledge the interest manifested in our little work, as evidenced by the rapid sale of some thousands of copies, and by the general tone of the comments which it has elicited.

In the work of revision, whilst in no respect withdrawing from the position which we have taken up in advocacy of a Reasonable and Scriptural Faith, we have endeavoured to modify a few expressions respecting the deep things of God which may have seemed somewhat harsh and over-dogmatic, and we have added some paragraphs in further explanation of our views, and of the sense in which we understand certain texts of Holy Scripture.



Several respected critics of the Essays on "The Atonement" have complained that the view taken by us of this doctrine is incomplete. But this is no more than we have ourselves said over and over again. The subject embraces so many aspects and is so wide in its range, that it would be presumptuous indeed to suppose that we had covered, in three brief Essays, the whole ground of this great article of Christian Faith. Our aim has been much more simple and unpretending; we have sought to present such a view of the subject as would harmonize with the simplicity of Christ's teaching, and commend itself to hearts longing for the sense of Reconciliation and Peace. But to do this effectually, we deemed it needful to make a clear and unmistakable protest against certain dogmatic statements on the question which are being continually presented by the "Evangelical" School. On this point some of our critics have told us that it is wisest to proclaim the truth, and leave the error to die of itself! But what if these false views are hindering multitudes from believing in Christ, and in His reconciling and saving

work? Knowing this to be the case, we feel that we should have greatly failed in our duty if we had not endeavoured, in the first place to put on one side, as unscriptural and unsound, those definitions and phrases which we believe to be contrary to the spirit of Christ's teaching, and dishonouring to God our Father.

On this, and kindred subjects, we have found, that—in the recent words of an eminent writer—"there are not a few earnest Christians who are ready to receive additional knowledge, *provided it be in harmony with what they already believe*; but who are very reluctant to accept correction or to unlearn. But unless we are willing to be corrected, even in our most cherished beliefs, the error which clings to imperfect knowledge will seriously hinder our spiritual progress. There is no foe to the attainment of truth more to be feared than mental bias. There is danger lest while we think we are defending the Gospel, we be fighting for an incrustation of base matter which hides and defaces the Gospel."

As regards the Essay on "Revelation and the

Bible,"—which has also attracted some criticism—we feel that our statement is well within the limits of the truth. We commend this special subject to the careful attention of our readers; from a conviction that the acceptance of Christianity by the thoughtful men of the future will depend largely upon a true and reasonable attitude on the part of its professors as to the human element in the Bible, and the progressive character of its teaching.

We are encouraged by the evidence that has come to us through the publication of these Essays, that there is a steadily increasing number of earnest Christian thinkers, who whilst not content with the theological definitions of past and less enlightened ages, are not on that account prepared to lose hold of the mighty force of Christianity, but are bent on finding the truth of the matter for themselves. But all are not of this temper. It is one of the sad facts that we have to face, that not a few of the kingly intellects of this generation have quietly but unmistakably turned away from Christianity, as if it were an unreasonable thing, and are teaching others also

their Gospel of Despair. All Christians are therefore called upon, in the dearest interests of the human race, honestly and fearlessly to consider the demand of this nineteenth century for a reasonable and a practical faith. If we take careful note of what is passing around us, we must see that the time is coming when those who love Christ and His Gospel, and know it to be "the Power of God unto Salvation," will have to clear the ground for a great conflict. They must minimize their differences—be willing to give up untenable positions and misleading terms, and stand together for the Faith, in its simplicity and spirituality, against those who are assailing it on every side.

We are glad in conclusion to quote the cheering words of the venerable poet Whittier on the subject of our little book. Writing to a correspondent in England, he says: "I am greatly interested in *A Reasonable Faith*, and I find myself in accord with it, and think it may be of great service. So far as I can see, it retains and emphasizes all that is vital in Christianity, while freeing it from much

that is Jewish or Heathen: much that is false, sensuous, materialistic, and which manifestly is the cause of fast-growing doubt and Agnosticism. *A Reasonable Faith* is, in short, Quakerism pure and undefiled."

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A REASONABLE FAITH.



## A REASONABLE FAITH:

### AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.

“It is of much more importance to give our assent to doctrines upon grounds of Reason and Wisdom, than on that of Faith only.”—ORIGEN.

“It is evident to me, that in Religion, as in other things, the offers of God are all directed, not to an indolent credulity, but to constant diligence, and to an unwearied search after Truth.”—MILTON.

“Reason is the only faculty we have wherewith to judge concerning anything—even Revelation itself.”—BISHOP BUTLER.

“Extravagant Dogmatism has made men revolt at the very idea of Dogma.”—BISHOP FRASER.

“The Church is safer, and the Faith healthier, when it is not bound by the fetters of a too curiously articulated creed.”—JEREMY TAYLOR.

THERE are at the present time a considerable and perhaps an increasing number of intelligent and cultivated men who are more or less dissatisfied with the religious Creeds and theological definitions with which they are familiar. Some,—who are not thoroughly Agnostics, nor prepared altogether to forego the consolations of religious faith and hope,—can yet scarcely be classed as Christians, in any

recognised sense of the word. They would probably call themselves Theists. Distrusting any real revelation of the Creator and of spiritual life, beyond what they dimly gather from the material universe, they practically reduce their religion to mere Rationalism, and thus inevitably fall more or less a prey to the old despairing cry, "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find Him out."

This temper of mind is, perhaps, to a large extent a rebound from the over-dogmatic tendency of past generations. It is a protest against much unreasonableness and error in the popular religious Creeds, against much unwarrantable assumption of authority over the consciences and minds of men, and in favour of the great right and duty of private judgment. But it is a position which is apt to lead into the narrowness and incompleteness of mere individuality, and into a disregard of historic evidence, and of the insight into Spiritual Truth, gained by previous generations. It is, moreover, confessedly a creed lamentably insufficient for the needs both of the Intellect and the Soul. To men of this class it is our object to present a view of Christianity which is at all events intelligible and reasonable.

But there are also many earnest and thoughtful *Christian* people who are ill at ease with some of the popular dogmas;—for there is still afloat in the religious atmosphere of the day much of the old scholastic dogmatism in a somewhat altered form,—

a survival of the creed of the early Reformers, with many of the exaggerations into which they were pushed by their fierce conflict with Rome and its opposite errors. Evangelicalism is, in fact, the modern form of Calvinism. It is the Augustinian and Genevan doctrine, *minus* its most repulsive predestinarian features. Now although in this, its modern guise, it has proved as might be expected, very attractive to that large class of minds which are religiously sensitive—emotional—rather than logical or discriminating, there are undoubtedly very many thoughtful people who are seeking for a more satisfactory conception of Christianity. They want a Faith at once Scriptural and reasonable. They have a profound conviction that the religion of the Bible cannot possibly, if rightly understood, conflict with the best human estimate of justice and pure morality, nor with sound reason. They hold belief in certain popular definitions of so-called orthodox doctrine to be not necessarily an essential part of true Religion. They are not wedded to any system or school of thought as ultimate, and completely or exclusively true. They are still seekers after Truth, and are prepared to modify their religious views, not hastily, but carefully and thoughtfully, as evidence and conviction dictate. For this class, also, we write; not professing to have ourselves “fully attained, either to be already perfect,” even in an intellectual understanding of Divine Truth; an attainment towards



which, doubtless, all should constantly aspire; but which, if reached, would yet be the lesser part of Religion.

Still, these papers are confessedly an attempt to exhibit an intelligible and tolerably definite religious belief; for nothing short of this will satisfy the reasonable needs of earnest and thoughtful minds. But to such, no "Doctrine" (using the word in its modern conventional sense) can be offered, in the present day, dogmatically. It can only be presented as a friendly suggestion purporting to be worth serious consideration.

"Doctrine" is one of the words the meaning of which has been restricted, and so more or less distorted, by theological handling. We are accustomed to speak of "doctrine" in contradistinction to "practice." But the simple meaning of the word is "teaching." We think it is Dean Stanley who says, "St. Paul always uses the word 'Doctrine' as meaning instruction in Duty, in that which it is right to do, and that which it is right not to do, including mental action as well as outward behaviour." This is, we believe, strictly the New Testament sense and application of the term. And so the Sermon on the Mount, which is often spoken of as not doctrinal, is really the most comprehensive and authoritative *doctrinal* exposition that the Bible contains. "The first inquiry," says Myers, "of the earnest soul is, What is Duty? the second, What is Truth?" It

will be a great gain to Religion when "*Doctrine*" is again understood to mean, principally, that which refers to the *practice* of Christianity.

For the better part of Theology, the real Knowledge of God and of the things of His Kingdom, is more an affair of the heart than of the head, and is largely independent of formulated creeds. Therefore we find pious, righteous, and doubtless "acceptable" men of all creeds and in all Churches. But the Theology of the Creeds and of the Schools is an intellectual structure which may readily be developed, down to minute particulars, in men who have very little real Religion. And yet every earnest and thoughtful man will naturally seek to shape for himself—or rather to be taught by the Spirit of God—an intellectual religious creed, a Theology; and the nearer it comes to the standard of Truth and to the broad and true teaching of Holy Scripture, the better. Our contention is not against Theology in the abstract, so far as it is really practical and useful, but against elevating it above, or putting it in the place of, Religion; against the notion that dogmas, framed either by individuals, however eminent, or even by synods and Churches, are to be held as binding upon communities, or upon the minds of individual men; and finally against the bigotry and tyranny of the idea that *any special* form of intellectual belief is necessary for the salvation of the soul. Let us never forget to make a clear

distinction between Doctrine and definitions of Doctrine, and even between Doctrine and Truth. Truth is changeless, the same for ever; "teachings" abound and vary indefinitely. And they will continue to vary with the times, and through the different mental conditions, in which they originate. Doubtless the best and most advanced portion of Christian thought will always be eagerly "reaching forward" towards broader and truer definitions and applications of Truth, still "walking by the same rule and minding the same things;" that is, trusting to the same Divine enlightenment which has taught the world all that it knows of Religious Truth, and building upon the same great fundamental principles of Religion, but interpreting them rather by the spirit than by the letter.

Now the spirit of the Gospel, as we understand it, is a spirit of *love* and of *power*, and of a *sound mind*. Its supreme characteristic is, that it is the Divine expression of LOVE. There is in it no trace of heathenish malignity or cruelty; no disregard of the true and permanent happiness of any human being.

To meet the needs of men it must be not merely a grand intellectual conception, a sublime Ideal (for such true Christianity undoubtedly is), but a practical and available *Power* offered by God to all His responsible creatures to enable them to reach this Ideal. It must be an Influence which is able to

subdue and to mould into real Righteousness the tendencies and affections of the human heart.

And finally, every article of Religious faith must be in harmony with sound reason and common sense ; otherwise it becomes a mere Superstition. The teachings of True Religion never *contradict* the best exercise of the intellectual faculty, however much they may transcend, or supplement, its intuitions.

In accordance with these fundamental principles we understand the Bible to be not simply either *a* Revelation or *the* Revelation, but rather the Record of a *Progressive Revealing* of Spiritual Truth ; each part adapted in its day to the gradually maturing intelligence of mankind in their inevitably slow progress towards a true understanding of those things which lie furthest from the elementary perceptions of men—"the things not seen."

And further we do not find in the facts or probabilities of the case, nor does the book itself claim that we are to look to the Bible (invaluable as its Spiritual Revelations are) as the sole religious Light and Teaching of the World ; nor that the Most High withholds from any living man some measure of the same Divine Influence which "inspired" the religious element of the Bible.

It is possible that those who have never strictly questioned or deliberately weighed the popular religious definitions and theological formulæ, may be startled at some of the statements to be found in

these pages. We ask such patiently and impartially to consider the views here offered, without rushing to the conclusion, that that which seems to them strange and unconventional is therefore unsound and untrue. We write for those, to whatever school or sect they may belong, who are sincere seekers after God and His Truth, and who are willing to look carefully, and with as little prejudice as possible, at anything which purports to be a sober and devout statement of Religious Conviction.

## FUNDAMENTAL RELIGION.

“The humble, meek, merciful, just, pious, devout souls, are everywhere of one Religion, and when Death has taken off the mask they will know one another, though the diverse liveries they wear here make them strangers.”—WILLIAM PENN.

“Happily the bases of Religion are few and solid. They teach men to look up to God as their Father, to Jesus as their Saviour, and to the Spirit of Him who sent His Son to save us, as the Source of Holiness and the Guide to Spiritual Truth. These are really the final and fundamental articles of Christianity.”—BISHOP FRASER.

RELIGION, in the only sense in which we here need to recognise the word, presupposes the existence of God. Not, however, necessarily any true and sufficient conception of Him, *for the fundamental principles of Religion are based upon the relations and disposition of God towards His creatures*, and not upon any of their imperfect ideas of that relation. So that these principles apply in some sense and degree to all the various phases of Religion that have ever obtained among men, to the darkest and most elementary, no less truly, than to Christianity itself. Not only are they essentially the same in reference to Socrates and St. Paul, to St. Bernard and Luther,



to Jeremy Taylor and George Fox, but also to the millions of mankind in all ages, who, though living under conditions of great moral and mental darkness, can never be severed from this radical relationship to the Creator, nor from His fatherly care. It is doubtless true that

“ In even savage bosoms  
There are longings, yearnings, strivings  
For the good they comprehend not,  
That the feeble hands and helpless  
Groping blindly in the darkness,  
Touch God’s right hand in that darkness  
And are lifted up, and strengthened.”

Because sceptics fail to find God, and idolaters misapprehend Him, He does not cease to be their God, nor they His children. Human misconceptions cannot possibly make any difference in His relations to us, however much they may affect our attitude towards Him.

We hold, therefore, that no theory of Religion can possibly be satisfactory, which is not broad enough in its range, from extreme elementary simplicity to reasonable completeness, to comprehend all the real God-seeking and truth- and goodness-loving of all mankind—savage and civilised, learned and ignorant, child and man.

Then the grandest fundamental truth with regard to Religion is evidently this: that it is something which God Himself inspires and superintends, ac-

cording to the needs, possibilities, and open-heartedness of each individual. Not the Bible, though its claim to this fundamental position is often insisted upon, but the Author and Revealer of all truth whether found in the Bible or elsewhere, is the sole primary source of all religious light and duty.

We often hear false religions spoken of. It would be better to speak of the falsities with which so many of the religious beliefs of mankind, not excepting Christianity itself, are surrounded and obscured. No system which recognises the existence of God and the moral responsibility of man is wholly false; and it may be said that no human conception or representation of even Christianity itself, is likely to cover the whole range of Spiritual Truth.

In the history of the human race, religious instincts and yearnings are facts almost universally traceable; and equally general is the recognition in some form or other, of the working of an unseen Divine Intelligence that "makes for Righteousness," and whom it is a duty to serve and obey. We hope therefore that the day has passed when any one need hesitate to speak of a "pious Heathen." Thoughtful men everywhere are beginning to recognise that although Spiritual Light and Knowledge are of immense importance, Spiritual Life is the one thing needful. That everywhere and under all circumstances, he that according to his light and opportunities "feareth God and worketh righteousness" is accepted with Him.

Therefore we put the desire for Righteousness or Holiness at the very head of the fundamental requisites of Religion. It is a hopeful sign of the times that no modern set of thinkers, religious or secular, Theist or Positivist, will have anything to do with any system that does not place real practical right-doing in the front of its theory. Perhaps we may say that it is steadily coming to this, that the system which has the greatest power to develop the best human conduct, will be rightly accepted as the truest system. To this test we are content to bring the claims of Christianity.

But one great obstacle to the establishment of this claim comes from within the Christian Church itself, from those who practically rob the word "Righteousness" of its reality, and reduce it to a theological fiction—an "imputedness"! No doubt expressions such as this are constantly used by worthy people, in a special and greatly modified sense. But such terms, in their plain and obvious meaning, would seem to imply that Righteousness consists in the hiding or covering up of sinfulness and wrong-doing by the Holiness of Christ—a being "reckoned" righteous "for Christ's sake"!

Surely this notion, in whatever specious or solemn garb it be clothed, is a fundamental mistake. Free forgiveness is one thing; the reckoning a man to be what he is not is quite another.

We repeat, then, that Holiness—the earnest persistent endeavour after the fulfilment of God's will in thought, word, and deed, made effectual by Divine help,—nothing imputed nor merely “reckoned,”—but the real moral condition, is an essential characteristic of Religion. Nay, more, any religion that can produce this condition in any degree, is *so far* of God; and Christianity we maintain to be the best and truest form of Religion, because it has the greatest power to develop Holiness.

But although it be admitted that Christianity has, broadly speaking, the soundest basis of reason, the best array of facts, and the grandest and happiest experience of mankind on its side, this is not enough. We want to know what is the truest and best conception of Christianity. For a religious system, which in its original simplicity and purity, although still waiting its mature development and application, is true and life-giving, may easily receive a wrong bias, and instead of progressing steadily towards its ultimate perfection, may become so perverted and distorted as to lose much of its beauty and power for good. We believe that no little of the trouble and unsettlement in the religious world, at the present time, is due to the fact that our popular theological and ecclesiastical systems, are inherited from the comparative darkness of the middle ages, rather than from Apostolic times. They abound in subtle and highly elaborated details, many of which are based

upon essentially false premises, and we shall practically dispose of not a few of them, if we succeed in discrediting some of the fundamental errors from which they spring. For there are certain broad principles at the very root of Christianity which leave no logical standing for the narrowness and harshness of Calvinism, for the pettiness and unspirituality of Ritualism and Symbolism, for the assumptions of Priestcraft, or for the pretensions of a cold Intellectualism that never reaches the heart.

As regards the right place of the intellect, and the importance of clear and reasonable views in relation to religious faith, Pope is, as usual, superficial and over-dogmatic in his well-known dictum:—

“ For modes of Faith let graceless zealots fight,  
His can't be wrong whose life is in the right.”

We may welcome the words as implying that no religion is worth notice that does not develop conscientious and holy living, yet they have helped to popularise the grave error that intellectual Light on matters of Faith is unimportant in procuring lives that are “in the right.” We can readily admit that the favour and blessing of God are bestowed upon rightness of purpose and motive, rather than upon rightness of knowledge. We can understand that His estimate of moral desert is based upon the condition of a man's inmost affections rather than upon the degree of his intellectual apprehension of abstract Truth, yet it is

no mean deliverance to be freed from serious misconceptions of religion. It is the height not only of mental happiness and attainment, but of spiritual blessing and power, even to approach the Apostolic ambition, "to be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." Looking however at Truth in this latter, its most practical aspect, as spiritual enlightenment and power, we may say that the seeking process is not exclusively nor even mainly intellectual work. It is not a struggle of dialectics, nor even a mere balancing of probabilities: it is something which has to be spiritually discerned. There is a Chinese proverb which says that "the light of Heaven cannot shine into an inverted bowl;" so we may say that Spiritual Truth cannot effectually enter a closed, unloving, rebellious heart. But of the fundamentals of Religion it may be safely said, that they who humbly and sincerely seek shall find, although they will continue throughout this life to long for fuller assurance and a wider range of vision. It is the old teaching which millions have proved to be sound, that if any man will do God's will, as far as it is revealed to him, he will steadily advance in religious perception and spiritual attainment.

We think that these also are fundamental truths: that life is meant to be educational; that the Great Master deals with us according to our capacities and circumstances, but that from all His scholars He looks for teachableness, obedience and diligence. With

these qualities in patient, persistent exercise, the true seekers after God will come to see Him and hear His voice for themselves. They will sit at the feet of Jesus and learn from Him, not perhaps any special system of theology so much as a growing sense of God's goodness and love, of the brotherhood of all God's family, and of the duties involved in this relationship; a growing love of Holiness, and conformity to the Divine Will, and so, by a natural and healthy process of gradual attainment, they will be led into all needful Truth, and "the Truth shall make them free."

## GOD OUR FATHER.

“ I believe that the Fatherly relation and purpose of God towards men is the fundamental revelation of Christianity ; and that all other true doctrines can only be explanatory, and illustrative or corroborative of it.”—THOMAS ERSKINE.

“ To find in God a mind that understands us and a soul that loves us, is the core of Religion.”—F. W. NEWMAN.

“ The essence of all Religion lies in unlimited love and reverence ; and this can only be attached to a person. In Nature we see but laws which we must obey. For Religion we must have a Lawgiver whom we can love.”—MYERS.

“ ‘ Our Father ’ is the root of all Religion and Morality.”—NORMAN McLEOD.

WE have already admitted that a Theology—some science of Religion—as definite as you like, for each individual according to his best understanding of it, is, more or less, a personal necessity. But dogmatic creeds, formulated in great detail, for universal use, have proved to be an intolerable bondage, and often a great hindrance and bewilderment to seeking souls.

After the Christian Church had begun to decline from the simplicity and reality of the primitive faith, Theologians busied themselves in collecting the dry



bones of the once-living Truths, and shaping them into Dogmas. These they not only offered to the people as Divine nutriment, but they even declared that there was no salvation apart from belief in them. Millions of people have done their best to live upon the contemplation of these Dogmas; and many, doubtless, have groped through and reached over them, to the living Truth beyond. But now the effort of the age and of its best teachers is to be rid of these petrifications, and to get back nearer to the living Christ, and to the clear vision of God our Father in Him.

The spirit of the text, that the soul-life consists in the knowledge of God, seems to us of the utmost significance. The special conception of the character of the Deity is, in fact, the fundamental idea in any system of Religion. If this estimate is a false and unworthy one, all the details of the system must be more or less erroneous.

Now there are three or four of these fundamental conceptions of God which have entered in various degrees and combinations into almost all systems of Religion.

Firstly, there is the idea, so common in heathen mythologies, of a terrible Being, unloving and unlovely, arbitrary, revengeful, almost diabolical; bent upon mischief to man, and needing to be propitiated—bought off in some way or other from his cruel purposes.

Secondly, there is the Creator; abstractedly only creative, though possibly in some dim sense "making for" order, and even "righteousness"; a Being far removed from man, and having no sensible bond of union with him, unapproachable and unknowable.

Thirdly, the Ruler and Judge, holy indeed, but stern and relentless; rigidly exacting rather than tender and merciful; to whom "satisfaction" must be rendered—and with whom, therefore, justice means principally retribution and punishment.

And finally, there is OUR FATHER, infinitely good and loving and true, long-suffering and merciful, yearning tenderly towards His children, and when inflicting pain, inflicting it not for Retribution's sake, but for Restoration's sake. "Good and upright is the Lord, therefore will He guide sinners in the way."

All these conceptions, not even omitting the first, the framers of our popular systems of Christian Theology have used. Sometimes, to the utter confounding of all laws of logic and consistency, the first and the last have been combined! And all these schemes have been professedly deduced from the Bible.

Now the Bible is indeed very largely a Revelation of God our Father, of His nature and attributes, of His wisdom and purposes, and of His relations to men. *But it is obviously the record of a progressive Revelation.* It began with the dim dawn of human intelligence

and spiritual insight, and gradually advanced to the full light of day. There may well be confusion, so long as men persist in giving to the first shadowy glimpses of the Deity, beheld by the early races of men, or amidst the external terrors of Mount Sinai, the same significance and importance as to the last great Revelation and beholding of Him in Christ.

For let us note that notwithstanding a "certain Greek poet" wrote "We are also His offspring," not only was there nothing in the heathen mythologies at all equivalent to the Christian idea of the Fatherhood of God, but even by the Jews it was scarcely at all realised before the time of Christ. There was indeed the germ of it in such passages as, "Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?" but here the second term explains the first, and indeed almost the whole scope of that early and rare use of the term Father. It meant Creator, and little more. The loving relationship which the Christian idea involves is one of the many glorious and beautiful truths brought to light by Jesus Christ.

The following anecdote is told of Edward Irving. He was preaching to a dense concourse near London, when he was interrupted by an appeal from the crowd; a child had strayed from its parents, and was held up by a stranger, who wanted to know what was to be done with the forlorn little creature. "Give him to me!" said the preacher, and it was

soon nestling with the most perfect confidence and contentment against his broad shoulder. It was a poor child, and poorly clad, but Irving was not the man to love and protect it the less on that account. He made it the subject of some beautiful discourse about the Fatherhood of God, and in his final prayer and blessing he particularly prayed for and blessed "the little child." Thousands listened with breathless interest to the grand and tender tones of his matchless voice, and felt afresh the power of that Divine love which embraces all helpless things. Canning once heard the same preacher describe an obscure family of orphans as "thrown on the Fatherhood of God." He repeated the words first to Sir James Mackintosh, who is said to have been startled by them, and afterwards in the House of Commons; and that single phrase had in it a truth and a power sufficient to draw half the House to hear the preacher.

Such is the native simplicity, attractiveness and beauty of this grand truth. But let us mark that it is a *revealed* truth, which slowly, and at first very dimly, dawned upon men. A defective conception of God and of His attitude towards us seems to be one of the conditions of our imperfect and composite nature; and no doubt it is greatly strengthened by false teaching. But it is personal rebellion against God and His moral laws which finally distorts our understanding of the matter, and it is wonderful how difficult it seems for the human race to get back, or

to rise, to a peaceful and happy conception of the personal and the universal love of God our Father. This is the crowning blessing of the Gospel. It is when we have attained to this, as a fixed and settled principle, a result of patiently and faithfully "learning Christ" that "perfect Love casteth out fear." There can be no true peace and trust until the old unworthy thoughts of our Father in Heaven have disappeared.

The anthropomorphic ideas of God which must always prevail, because they are so natural and so needful to our comprehension of Him, lead us at once to the beautiful analogy expressed in the text, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." David got as far as that: but Christ taught us that God's Love is more comprehensive. He not only pities, but He tenderly loves even those who do not practically fear Him or love Him at all. And indeed the human analogy might teach us as much as this. Does any one of us who is a father cease to love a son because he is wayward and rebellious—much less because he is ignorant?

Such evidently is the spirit of the Christian teaching as regards God. How, then, has it happened that one of the most influential schools of thought in the Christian Church has, during the last three centuries, so far distorted and misrepresented a beautiful tender righteous faith like this, as to sanction and uphold all the horrors of predestination and the

injustice of substitutional punishment? We thankfully believe, however, that these doctrines are now rapidly losing their hold upon the minds of thoughtful Christian people, though not until they have wrought untold mischief and misery in the world.

The Christian idea, then, of the Fatherhood of God absolutely demands that it shall include infinite patience, compassion, and love—extended to all His family. With our dimness of vision, and the narrowness of its range, it will not be possible always to trace either the equity or the tenderness of God's dealings. But this is only another feature of the beautiful analogy between the human and the Divine relationship of father and child.

It is quite true that this loving Fatherhood of God can only be adequately understood and enjoyed by trustful and loving hearts, through the revelation which we have of Him in Jesus Christ. The Divine Son lived a human life, died, and rose again, for the behoof of every other son in human form, that He might bring them to the Father's house and arms. And nothing but a wilful and persistent rejection of His authority and love can exclude any from their inheritance in this home of God's eternal love and fatherly care.

Our ideas of God the Father ought to be fully worthy of the best estimate we have formed or can form of the "glad tidings" of the Gospel. The love of Christ should be accepted as simply the love



of God in Christ. The "joy and peace in believing" should be the joy of believing in Him who so loved the world that He gave His well beloved Son to evidence that love. It is well to take a large view of the fulness in which this doctrine of the loving Fatherhood of God is presented in the New Testament. In the parable of the Prodigal Son we have a story of infinite pathos and naturalness: a story which makes fatherly and filial hearts, all the world over, throb with pure emotion. There is the long-suffering love that rebellion and disobedience cannot destroy; the changeless love that cannot forget the absent; the deep hopeful love that does not despair for the reprobate; the active unslumbering love that is bent on winning back the beloved, though deluded, wanderer.

Christ also appeals with wonderful power to that true characteristic of parents in delighting to bestow gifts upon their children, and to supply all their reasonable requests; and the assurance is added that this desire is only a faint reflection of God's feelings towards His children.

How exquisitely is the great Truth of which we have been writing embodied and placed at the very head and front of that precious legacy of Christ to His disciples—the Lord's Prayer! "Our Father who art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name!" What sweet, simple, hearty, reverent, loving words!—words that may evidently go up from any heart, that can

"**find** the heart" to utter them. A blessed privilege it **is** indeed to feel the access to the Father made **near** by His own love in Christ; to be assured that His own Divine Spirit prompts and welcomes our **prayers**. Whomsoever the Spirit of God inspires **with** a reverent thought, a longing aspiration towards **Himself**, He surely qualifies and permits there and **then**, to use those consoling and worshipping words, "**Our** Father who art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy **Name!**"



## GOD MANIFEST IN THE FLESH.

“God made His highest Revelation to man, not through a philosophy, or a code of laws, or a book ; but through a human life. The Truth was lived in and by Christ. The Life was the Light of Men.”—  
FARRAR.

MONOTHEISM is the key-stone of true religion. The grossest and most immoral superstitions that have held the human race in bondage have been developed not only under, but by, the blindness that has failed to recognise the Divine Unity.

The monotheistic element of Mohammedanism, notwithstanding all the falsities with which it was associated, gave new life and vigour to half the mediæval world. So far, then, as the scholastic dogma of the Trinity, in its common acceptance, tends in any degree to undermine or confuse the idea of pure monotheism, it becomes a grave danger to the Christian Church.

The true Christian conception of the threefold manifestation of God, which has acquired the title of “the Trinity,”—so much at least of this infinite subject as can be grasped by the finite mind of man,—may perhaps be presented thus : In order to adapt the

needful revelation of Himself to the nature of man the Most High has manifested Himself in nature, in history, and in the human heart; that is to say, besides the ordinary evidences of His supreme power and Godhead in creation, He has made two special manifestations of Himself: one temporary and visible—*God manifest in the flesh*; and the other eternal and not cognisable to the outward senses—*God manifest in the spirit*.

The scriptural revelation, then, is not so much that of a Trinity as of a Unity—a term which does not necessarily infringe in the least upon the essential Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ, the character and purpose of whose wonderful revelation of God the Father we now proceed to consider.

The Jewish peasant who cried, "Show us the Father, and it is all we want," did but express the intense longing of the whole human race. This was indeed as the old prophet called it, "the desire of all nations." From the earliest times the universal instinct of mankind, working beyond the bounds of outward sense and demonstration, has dimly recognised the existence of a great supreme Creator, Sustainer, and Ruler of the worlds. They have felt how great He is, how strong He is, how wise He is, yet no less universally and consciously have they felt how unsearchable He is! The Infinite was utterly beyond their reach, therefore the universal longing was for a manifestation, an embodiment of the invisible God which they could

see and understand; and this they vainly endeavoured to fashion for themselves. For this they reared idols, sometimes beautiful, sometimes uncouth and terrible; seeking thus to embody in their blind imperfect way the human idea of the Almighty. Some more enlightened, distrusting their own devices, longed for a visible Divine Friend and Guide, whom they could understand, whose hand they could take hold of, whom they could intelligently worship and love, at whose feet they could sit and reverently learn Divine Truth.

In condescension to this most natural desire, this imperative and universal need, "in the fulness of time," that is, as soon as mankind could understand and profit by the revelation, *God was manifest in the flesh*. The Lord Jesus Christ, "in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," came and lived a human life. In Him Divine power showed itself, as we might expect it would, in deeds of beneficence, in bringing order out of disorder, in giving health to the diseased, sight to the blind, food to the hungry, and spiritual light to those who sat in darkness and the shadow of death. In Him holiness was seen spotless, unvarying, and most winning.

He spoke words of Divine Wisdom such as never man spoke before or since—words of truth and goodness which are as fresh and welcome to seeking souls in the nineteenth century as they were in the first. But penetrating and embracing all that He said or did was His unfathomable love and tenderness and

pity. The key-note of His life is to be found in His repeatedly recurring words, "*I have compassion.*" He came to show us the Father, supreme in love and in goodness as He is in power.

Henceforth all who long for God may find Him in Christ. Those who yearn for a loving Almighty friend and protector to cling to and love, have their yearning satisfied in Christ. The little child can realise God in Christ, while the sage can rejoice in that wonderful revelation of the Divine which shines forth from the life and character of Him who loved to describe Himself as "the Son of man." Thus all possible excuse for idol worship, or for virgin or saint worship, is gone for ever. Jesus of Nazareth—"God manifest in the flesh"—is the Divinely attested impersonation of the very Godhead to whom men address their worship and their prayer; not another God, but the Eternal making Himself manifest in a human life. We may confidently assert, too, that this revelation of God in Christ was exactly what was needed to give the assurance of Divine pity to every erring soul, and of Divine forgiveness and help to every penitent and submissive soul. It was very principally to bring this assurance home to all that the Lord Jesus Christ lived, and suffered, and died.

Christ's life also meets another universal and imperative want. It presents a perfect example, a true ideal, adapted for mankind everywhere and in all ages. In His self-sacrificing love, in His stainless purity,



in His meek but manly humility, in His entire conformity to the Divine mind and will, He showed to the world a perfect pattern of what all human lives, "according to their measure," should be.

The Divinity of Christ is, then, the "chief corner-stone" of the Christian faith. There is obviously a vital difference between the most exalted estimate of Christ's character as a merely human being of matchless genius, spiritual insight, and moral excellence, and that which represents Him as God manifest in the flesh. It is not too much to say that the life and future of Christianity depend upon this latter conception. This revelation is the more remarkable inasmuch as Jewish monotheism, upon which it was engrafted and from which it sprang, was certainly above all other religions, jealous of any such manifestation.

Whilst it is impossible to overstate the character of the evidence which the claim made on behalf of Jesus of Nazareth obviously demands, it is equally beyond a doubt that such evidence is actually furnished in the life portrayed in the Gospels. That these narratives are authentic and truthful transcripts of the impression made upon contemporaries is now almost universally admitted. Even such men as Renan, who ignore the Divinity of Christ, admit the general truthfulness and exceeding moral beauty of the sacred biography. But it is asked, How can a human being be in any true sense Divine—one with the Infinite

God? Without entering here upon a discussion which would be beyond our limits, an illustration may throw some light on this mystery. If we stand by the seaside, and gaze on the waters of some bay as they flow in between the surrounding land, we say and say truly, "This is the sea;" and yet, beautiful and glorious as it is, it is but a limited and circumscribed view of the broad, boundless ocean. Nevertheless it is as much of the ocean as can be included within that opening in the land. So we see in Christ as much of God as *can* be manifest in a human life.

Christ represents the Father as no man has ever done before or since. He does nothing and says nothing which may not be regarded as done and said on behalf of God. In short, He makes in the "body of flesh" a representation which unveils to humanity the nature and the attributes of God, so that "he that seeth the Son seeth the Father also." Therefore, pre-eminently, He reveals God as the Saviour. It is as truly "God our Saviour," as it is "Christ our Saviour." In the whole scope and design, and therefore equally in all the details of Salvation and Redemption, the unity of God and Christ is absolute.

Whilst thus maintaining in its integrity the essential oneness in nature and purpose of the Father and the Son, it is needful also jealously to uphold the faith of Christendom in the *person* of Jesus Christ. Men *must* have a personal Saviour—the very same who lived and taught upon earth, and whose

human image and life are burned into the heart of humanity; Him, and no simple abstraction, must we have to reverence, and love, and worship. But all this no genuine monotheist can in any sense separate from the thought of God—the Father, the Creator, and, essentially, the Saviour of mankind.

It is evident that the chief characteristic and value of this revelation of God consist in its translation into the facts of human nature. We can feed upon it because its spiritual essence is thus in a sense materialised and accommodated to the needs of finite natures. We see illustrated in a veritable human life qualities which otherwise we could never have deemed associable or even possible.

Thus, indeed, in a limited sense, Jesus Christ represents also humanity. It may be said that to a certain extent He reveals man to himself, both by the contrast of His own holiness and perfect obedience, and by the evidence which His life affords of the true dignity of man, and of the possibilities of human nature working in harmony with God.

But Christ's purpose is, we think, entirely mis-stated when it is said that He represents humanity in the sense of putting Himself in its stead, as personating sinners, as acting and suffering in their stead, so as to spare them the suffering which is the inevitable penalty of sin, and to supersede the necessity of the self-denying struggle which is involved in a life of Righteousness. Such things are entirely incompatible with

His character as the representative of the Most High—the revealer of the righteousness and goodness of God. It was *God*—not sinful man—who was *manifest in the flesh*. His purpose was, not so much to personate ourselves, as to show us the Father. “No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath made Him known.” Therefore, although Jesus Christ in His human character wonderfully dignifies human nature and visibly restores its God-likeness, by associating with it the moral perfections of Divinity—although this is much, far more is it, that by means of this same humanity He gives us a sense of fellowship and of communion with The Most High; we may understand the things concerning the Kingdom of God, we may approach God, we may commune with God, *in Jesus Christ*.

It is in this practical sense that His words apply, “No man cometh unto the Father but by Me;” that *is*, it is only through the means of His revelation in *the flesh* that we can adequately apprehend, and love and trust—in Scripture language, “come unto,” God. *Just* as there is no light or heat for the world, except *through* the agency of the sun, so, as a simple matter of fact, there is no adequate knowledge of God, nor of the nature and means of the soul’s renewal unto *Righteousness* (which is the equivalent of that knowledge), but in Christ.



Let us now consider a little the actual experience which Christian Faith and faithful Christian living have uniformly developed from this manifestation of God in the flesh, notwithstanding the various shades of meaning—some of them very crude and faulty—in which the revelation has been conceived.

*Firstly*, The trouble and remorse of a guilty conscience and the fear of wrath and of death are taken away, through a direct personal reception and assurance of God's forgiving and restoring love as proclaimed in the life and death of Jesus Christ.

*Secondly*, A new and exhilarating life is then originated or quickened in the soul, by a conscious reception of the presence and influence of the Divine Spirit, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, which He promised: "The Spirit itself bearing witness with our spirits that we are the children of God."

*Thirdly*, There has been found in this faith and in the influence of this Spirit, a power which eventually remodels all the dispositions of the mind and all the purposes of life. This power has brought under control the most unruly passions. It has made and it continues to make gentle, loving and self-denying men, out of selfish and intractable ones. It illuminates and expands the understanding, and gives to human life its manifold interests and joys, and even to its trials and sufferings, a consistency, harmony, and dignity of purpose, towards which no other philosophy makes any visible approach.

*Lastly*, and perhaps above all, comes an experience of a most ennobling character—the direct and conscious communion with God through Jesus Christ.

Now all this may go steadily on in the soul of the Christian, notwithstanding the shocks to his faith and the various intellectual difficulties which inevitably at times beset thoughtful minds. For in truth, this experience is a living and growing one—something which becomes continually more operative, more and more self-asserting and convincing. Honestly dealt with, it never fails nor fades; it survives physical strength and mental energy; it is really “a shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” We are not now, be it remembered, merely cataloguing the things which ought theoretically to attach to a true religious faith; we are stating accomplished facts, to which millions of Christian believers through nineteen centuries of most varied circumstances unfalteringly testify.

Then we say, that this faith in Christ, so rich in the noblest results, must needs be of God. If there be a God, and if it be true that He has permitted *such* results uniformly and universally to flow from a true operative faith in a living and divine Christ, then *God manifest in the flesh* is, to us, the central truth of Christianity.

## GOD MANIFEST IN THE SPIRIT.

"The most acute of reasoners, and most profound of thinkers, the most instructed in earthly knowledge, is nothing, except he has also within him the presence of the Spirit of God."—J. H. NEWMAN.

"What scripture of the New Testament can you read that does not point to a kingdom of God which none can enter but by being born of the Spirit; in which none can continue alive, but by being led by the Spirit, and in which not a thought or desire or action can be allowed to have any part, but as it is a fruit of the Spirit?"—WILLIAM LAW.

THAT Great Being who condescended for our sakes to manifest Himself as the Son of Man did not end His revealing and redeeming work at the Crucifixion, nor even at the Resurrection. His human life of Holiness and self-sacrificing Love and His submission to humiliation and death "that He might bring us to God," form indeed the great evidence of the forgiving love and mercy of God, and the gathering point for sin-burdened souls throughout all time.

But it is not difficult to see how incomplete, and comparatively ineffective, even this gracious display of God's love and good-will would have been, if it had stopped there; men needed not only those outward manifestations of Divine Power and Goodness

which sacred history records, but every living person needs an equally real manifestation and assurance of them in his own soul; a manifestation which shall be not only life-giving but *life-supporting*.

In fact, our Lord implied that this was the greater need and the greater work of the two. He told His perplexed disciples that it was expedient for them (and for all) that He should go away, in order, as the text implies, that His redeeming work might become personal, direct, deeply and spiritually real and world-wide. In a word, that He might finally reveal Himself to the world,—which had been gradually prepared by His previous manifestations,—as *God manifest in the Spirit*.

It is evident that the Apostles, and the believers generally, soon realised this promise, and found the value and the comfort of the Divine presence beyond their highest hopes. Christ, when no longer visible to their outward eyes, was revealed to them as a still living and omnipotent Saviour. He was their Comforter, Teacher, Strength-giver and Guide. He helped them more fully to comprehend, and to live out, His truth. He helped them to preach, to gather in and to build up. He helped them to be patient and to endure, as seeing Him who is invisible. They became more and more conscious, as time passed on and their spiritual faculties were developed, that He whom they loved was always with them, as He had promised, to guide and to sustain. And

their preaching was proved by its results to be in the demonstration of this Spirit and power; "with the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven."

This Spiritual presence of the Master was by no means confined in primitive times to the preachers. It was as real to the hearers as to the Apostles themselves. Nor was this manifestation granted to the Church for one special emergency only. The need of a Divine Helper for man is world-wide, and extends through all time. Hence that most gracious promise, "Lo! I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

"God is a Spirit," said the great Revealer. A living Spirit, not "a stream of tendency" only, not a mere expression of law and of system, not a humanly conceived embodiment of ideal goodness or might, but a personal Life, a Divine will, a supreme Intelligence, the soul and source of Goodness as well as of creative Power.

Then God being a Spirit, Holy and Good, what naturally follows? Assuredly nothing short of this, that He will directly and personally communicate with those whom He has endowed with spiritual natures, *through these natures*. It is impossible to think of the Divine Spirit, as revealed to us by Christ, doing anything less than this, yet there is hardly any other great and obvious spiritual fact from which so little has been practically deduced. "Unless I see this or that I will not believe,"

appears to be still the faithless tone of the great mass of mankind.

Since the early days of Christianity there have been, it may be, no manifestations from the spirit-world perceptible to the outward senses; and this is made the excuse for much practical unbelief. "As for this Moses," people still cry in effect, "we wot not what is become of him." The animal nature, indolent and untrustful, shrinks from the trouble of that great educational process by which the Father seeks to teach us to look towards, and confide principally in, the invisible and the eternal.

But this craving for external objects of faith and worship,—apart from the satisfaction which it legitimately finds in Christ,—is the very root and essence of Idolatry. And in these days, the faithlessness that often lies at the bottom of the craving, leads to the assumption that there is *no* Divine manifestation remaining to us. This widespread Gospel of Despair continually represents God as having practically withdrawn from the world since His revelation in Christ; and that now His followers are left to make the best they can of the record of His Love and Power as found in the New Testament!

The reasonable Truth, however, is that God's revelation has ever been a continuous and progressive one, and the stage to which it has now developed (in addition to the past historical evidences, which still remain) is that of God more fully manifest in



the Spirit. This, doubtless, in its nature and essence, is the final stage. The future and ever-growing development must consist in the degree in which men apprehend and avail themselves of this mighty Truth.

The more advanced portion of mankind is no longer in childhood, needing picture-book religion. The world has had outward evidence enough. If it believe not the sacred writers, and the abounding testimony of Christian experience in all ages, neither would it believe though ever so much outward evidence were continued to it. Whatever may have been its service in past ages, the fact seems to be, that sensuous evidence to Spiritual Truth is unsatisfactory and inconclusive as a permanent institution. So long as *it* prevails, the purely spiritual is either undeveloped, or it is overborne and thrust aside.

Notwithstanding the illogical protests of men who travel too exclusively in another region of Thought, we think there is abundant evidence that from the earliest times the spirit of man has been visited by the Divine Spirit with a view to his education and elevation. We are fully warranted in believing that God manifest in the Spirit—the Divine Voice within, calling to penitence, and a life of Faith and Duty—is, and ever has been present, more or less, to the human soul as a real experience, although often an obscure and almost unconscious one. The light shines in the midst of various degrees of darkness, and

therefore is not adequately comprehended. The illustration given in Holy Scripture of the wind blowing where it listeth independently of the will of man, and often unintelligibly to him, is significant enough. And yet the wind fulfils the purposes of God. It is not only conceivable but altogether in harmony with sound reason, that all human disposition towards goodness and holiness and self-denial is the direct inspiration of God, manifest in the Spirit.

Yet there is a school of religionists who would deny His manifestations in the heart of any but a believer! If this were so, how could sinners become saints? God must give the germ of faith, as He alone can give the germ of life. In the words of Dr. Pusey,—“The grace of Christ must precede our good-will; the grace of Christ must sustain and perfect our good-will. It is in us, not without us, that He perfects our good-will. He builds us up, not as dead stones, without our will; but with our will, as living stones, with a life from Himself.”

Christ, as “the Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world,” is God manifest in the Spirit, —the one enlightening, life-giving, redeeming power. This great Visitant of human hearts is the Spirit of the living Christ. It is a mighty help to be able to associate the universally inspeaking voice with a Divine Person.

It is of the utmost importance that our ideas upon this subject should be clear and simple. Let



us settle it once for all, that there is only one Divine Spiritual power. Whatever we call this Holy Influence,—the Spirit of God—the Holy Spirit—Christ in us—the Spirit of Grace,—all is one, all simply God manifest in the Spirit.

And again, however we separate and distinguish between various modes of operation,—according to the purposes to be accomplished,—they are all adaptations of the same Influence.

No spiritual good of any sort, no genuine improvement nor renewal, no true Christ-likeness, no sanctification, no justification, no knowledge of God or of Christ, can possibly be developed in any soul except through this Influence. Now although the world was by no means without the Divine Spirit before the time of Christ, yet we find it represented in the Gospels that the coming of Christ in the flesh, and His ascension to Heaven, marked a crisis in man's spiritual history. God provided and used this opportunity greatly to increase its outpouring and prevalence.

It has indeed been increasingly of late years the theory of many of the Christian Churches that the Holy Spirit does perceptibly influence the souls of men: but there is reason to fear that in a multitude of minds this is little more than a theory. It is but too evident that the doctrine is popularly regarded as true in the abstract, but for the most part practically unintelligible and inoperative,—correct theology

and nothing more. We feel a strong conviction that here is nothing so much needed in the Christian world at the present time as a practical belief that Christ Himself comes as a convincing and saving Light and Power to every rebellious soul; and as a life and peace-giving Presence to every believing and obedient soul; guiding to duty, qualifying for work, sustaining and strengthening for every time of need.

It is surely impossible that mankind can make the needed progress in genuine religious enlightenment, in freedom from human and hierarchical interference, and in a true appreciation of the spirituality of all real religion, until they avail themselves far more freely and heartily of this direct intercourse with God through the Spirit.

What though, to worldly and irreligious men, the doctrine seems over-mystical and unreal? To a man born blind, light must be very largely an unmeaning and incomprehensible thing: to a worldly man, a man who voluntarily lives in moral and religious darkness,

“Doors shut and windows barred,”

God's spiritual light will be as uncomprehended and unavailing. But it would be dishonouring to God our Father, to suppose that He does not offer to every one of His created children some influence of His grace and good Spirit “to profit withal.” It is for them to see to it, that they “receive not the grace of God in vain.”

At the present day multitudes are glad to hear about Christ. It is a pleasant thing to sit at the feet of an able and eloquent preacher who has for his theme the ineffable sweetness of that Life once lived in Palestine for our sakes. But this is not enough. The hunger and thirst of a needy soul cannot thus be satisfied. Faith and submission, if they are to be obtained, require something more than listening to the sound of the Gospel or learning creeds. Christ, the manifested God, the Living Bread from Heaven, is a glorious theme—but bread must be partaken of, not merely read of or talked about, to do us good; and people are by no means so willing to come to Christ Himself and sit at His feet and learn of Him. *God manifest in the Spirit* is a crucial doctrine. It goes to the root of the matter, and “tries every man’s work, of what sort it is.”

It is in fact impossible to over-estimate the importance of this great Truth. The living Word of God, the Divine Light, visits every man who comes into the world—and *that*, not to condemn (although He *convinces* of sin) but to enlighten and to save. All who receive Him lovingly and loyally become, in the wonderful language of Holy Scripture, “temples” for the “Holy Ghost to dwell in.” The saints of old spoke of the Eye of the Lord being on them that fear Him, for good; but the higher revelation in Christ assures us of a far closer intimacy between

God and man,—nothing short of the indwelling of God Himself by His Spirit in the regenerate soul. How full of restraining, sanctifying and life-giving power is this mighty Truth! The feeling of the little child who said when tempted to sin, “I recollected that I was a temple of the Holy Ghost and left off—ashamed of what I was about to do,” was but a type of that which ought to be a common Christian experience.

And yet, notwithstanding the widespread neglect of this marvellous privilege, not a few intelligent and sober-minded people, men by no means superstitious or impulsive, have made this Divine Presence their practical strength-giver and guide in all the affairs of life. They have believed themselves inspired by a direct influence from God: and they have so trusted this influence and this guidance, even when it has directly contradicted their own wishes and views, that their one aim and purpose in life has been to lean upon it and follow it faithfully. We hold indeed that no Religious Truth is built upon a firmer basis of sound practical evidence than this of the Real Presence of the Divine Spirit in the hearts of God's trustful and dutiful children.

But the fear with many thoughtful and sensible men is, that this doctrine is so surrounded with danger that it had better not be prominently dwelt upon. Are, then, God's best spiritual favours to be thus neglected because they are liable to be simulated

by false enthusiasms? It is true that unbalanced minds, only partly subject to the Divine Spirit, have sometimes gone thus astray. They have overlooked the great corrective of human fancies which is to be found in the definite revelations of Divine Truth and human duty in the Scriptures, and above all in the life and teaching of Christ, and so have lapsed into fanaticism and wild delusions. But what have unbalanced minds done in other directions! Has this doctrine of the indwelling Spirit of God been more misconceived and distorted than other great Truths? God's free mercy in Christ has been perverted into the unworthy and mischievous dogma of substitution and of imputed righteousness: God's sovereignty into cruel partiality: and the real Presence of Christ into a mere ceremonial! In the same way, no doubt, the doctrine of the guidance of the Spirit has been at times sadly misconceived and misapplied. But this is an exceptional result, in no respect impairing the value of the Truth which it misrepresents.

All God's revelations need to be intelligently received. Spiritual impressions must be tested by experience, and by the Divine revelations in the past. We have to prove all things and to watch for further light. Even our outward senses are guided and perfected by the results of experience; and it would be strange if it were not so as regards the things of the Spirit.

It may in truth be said that the doctrine of God manifest in the Spirit, honestly and trustfully accepted, is one of the surest preservatives against fanaticism; against submission to the bondage of human creeds; against misconception of Scripture truth; and in promotion of breadth and catholicity of heart.

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“ By Christ the mystery of life is read :  
The picture-writing of the world's grey seers,  
The myths and parables of the primal years,  
Whose letter kills, by Thee interpreted  
Take healthful meanings fitted to our needs;  
And in the soul's vernacular, express  
The common law of simple righteousness.  
Hatred of cant, and doubt of human creeds  
May well be felt; the unpardonable sin  
Is to deny the word of God within!”

WHITTIER.

## THE ATONEMENT;

### SOME THINGS WHICH IT IS NOT.

"In plucking the brand from the burning, Christ felt the fire, but its marks are not to be regarded as payment to God. Such payment, if it would draw men nearer to the Person of Christ, would remove them further off from God. A bargain has no relation to love, but Christ's wounds are the outgoing of God's love, the pledge of its reality, the gauge of its depth, not equivalents for sin."—BISHOP EWING.

"I deny the conception of our Lord's sufferings as penal, as well as those notions of salvation which it involves. Would to God we could lose our Calvinism and put all the teaching of Christ and **His** Apostles in a form according to fact, and not theory."—NORMAN McLEOD.

"Half the wrong conclusions at which mankind arrives, are reached by the abuse of metaphors."—LORD PALMERSTON.

THE longing for Reconciliation with God—something that may bring rest to the conscience in regard to past sin, is a fundamental characteristic of Religion.

Men everywhere, through the convictions of the Divine Spirit, feel that they have transgressed the moral laws;—have done things which they ought not to have done, and neglected things which they ought

to have done; and for this they want a sense of forgiveness and of reconciliation with the Power against whose will and laws they have rebelled. In the most heathenish, equally with the most spiritual and lofty form of religion, this longing has presented itself. Costly sacrifices have been offered, terrible penances undergone, priestly tyranny and assumption submitted to; no sacrifice has been judged too great,—if only the sin-burdened soul might thereby gain courage to present itself before the offended Deity, assured of His pardon and love. Surely there is something genuine and true in so universal a cry!

How, then, did the Divine Father meet this longing of His children? The Scripture answer is plain: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself."

Yet the great truth of God's eternal love to His creature man, and of His willingness freely to forgive and restore penitent and submissive souls—a truth which has been manifest in His dealings with men throughout all time, and which is supremely assured to us by the human life and death of Christ—has been so distorted and mystified by theologians, that multitudes of thoughtful people, although full of this longing for Reconciliation, have shrunk from the doctrine of the Atonement in the garb in which it has been presented to them. They have been told that God is angry, and must be propitiated;



that He is just and cannot forgive their debt, unless indeed (strange contradiction!) some one pay it for them. They are then assured that Jesus Christ has intervened and borne the Father's wrath, suffered the punishment due to them, and paid the debt; and that therefore God is now able and willing to forgive them for Christ's sake! An eminent dignitary of the Church has recently told us that it was needful for God to work a "moral miracle" in order that He might be able to forgive; as though there were some abstract principle or power greater than Himself, whom (or which) it was needful to overcome by a miracle!

But is it true that God's displeasure is thus harshly and blindly retributive? Or is it, on the contrary, merciful, restorative, directed against the sin, and not against the sinner? Is the Justice of God divorced from His Love? Is Christ alone the all-loving and compassionate, while the Father is relentless and sternly exacting? Or, may we not see all the gracious attributes of The Most High reflected in Him who is, for us, "God manifest in the flesh"? Does God need to be reconciled to man, or is it not rather mankind that needs to be reconciled and brought back to God? Does He forgive "for Christ's sake," or is it not rather for His own love and mercy's sake exhibited to man in Christ? Could justice really be satisfied by punishing an innocent person in order to acquit the guilty?

Was not the poet right when he said—

“ Nothing can be good in Him  
That evil is—in me.  
The wrong that pains my soul below  
I dare not throne above :  
I know not of His hate, I know  
His goodness and His Love.”

And finally, is there not a radical difference between suffering *instead of* another (“vicariously”) and suffering on behalf of, or on account of another? and was it not in this latter sense that Christ “suffered for us”?

Upon this point William Law writes very pertinently: “To say that Christ suffered in our place or stead is as absurd, as contrary to Scripture, as to say that He rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven in our place and stead. For His sufferings, death, resurrection and ascension are all of them equally on our account, for our sake, for our good and benefit, but none of them possible to be in our stead.”

It is true that His suffering saves us from sin and its penalties, if our hearts are so touched by the Love which this suffering manifests that we come to God, and are thus truly “reconciled to Him by the death of His Son.” But this is not *vicarious* suffering in the strict sense of that word—in the sense in which Christ is commonly said to have borne the suffering (or punishment) which is due to us on account of our sin. Yet it is surely the sense in which all such texts as that “the chastisement of our peace was upon Him” are to be understood.

Few words in the language have suffered more from conventional handling than this word "Atone-ment." Its true significance is clearly 'At-one-ment, or Reconciliation. But this plain meaning has been almost buried under far different definitions, which have, in the course of the degenerate ages of Christianity, been thrust upon it. In the theological textbooks of almost every Church, Catholic and Protestant, the word has come to mean "expiation"—the offering of an innocent victim to satisfy the claims and avert the anger of the Deity.

But are not such words as "expiation" and "propitiation," in their full and true meanings, part of the drift which has come down to us from dark times—gathered first from Heathenism into Judaism, and then into Christian phraseology—but adapted with very imperfect success? Notwithstanding the gentle violence intended to be done them, they constantly tend to re-assert their original significance. Surely, too, such words as "ransom," "redemption" and "mediation" can only describe the effect of the Saviour's work upon men's souls, and not its relation to the Father.

Otherwise, the question arises, *To whom* was the ransom paid? Some of the old Christian Fathers solved this difficulty of their theory by boldly asserting that it was paid to the devil. But the Church in later time superseded this monstrous doctrine by propounding one, in effect, more monstrous still,

namely, that the ransom was paid to the Father, to reconcile Him, and to induce Him to let the prisoners of His justice and of His anger go! And this, we suppose, is still the popular and what is called the "orthodox" theory of the Atonement. But the true religious perception of the age—in other words, the outcome of the Spirit of Christ working upon the minds and consciences of thoughtful seeking people, has resulted in a protest—largely, as yet, unspoken, but still firm and vigorous—against this and other kindred teaching. To this, rather than to any increased enlightenment of the bulk of ecclesiastics and theologians (although there have been, and are, not a few illustrious exceptions), is due the fact that the harsher features of the doctrine are being quietly set aside.

And yet, so almost universal, in the last generation was this Calvinistic view of the Atonement, and so inveterate are old established habits of thought—that not only are there many persons in all the Evangelical Churches who still hold it, but even some of those who have rejected its grosser features are probably harbouring remnants of the doctrine which are, as we think, seriously erroneous.

And it should be remembered that doctrinal error of this character, even though it may not consciously weaken the faith of those who inherit it and are content, without much thought, to hold it—cannot now be presented, with any chance of acceptance, to

the multitude of cultivated minds of a different type who are (quite justifiably) seeking for a reasonable Faith. Such minds would certainly shrink from uniting with the gentle Dr. Watts (a moderate "Evangelical" of his day), when, speaking of "God's throne of Love," he says—

“ Once 'twas a seat of dreadful wrath,  
And shot devouring flame :—  
Our God appeared consuming fire,  
And Vengeance was His name.  
Rich were the drops of Jesus' blood  
That calmed His frowning face,  
That sprinkled o'er the burning throne,  
And turned the wrath to grace.”

So also with such words as these, which we still find in modern hymn-books—

“ Jehovah lifted up his rod,  
O Christ ! it fell on Thee.  
Jehovah bade His sword awake,  
O Christ ! it woke 'gainst Thee !  
Thy blood the flaming blade must slake,  
Thy heart its sheath must be ! ”

For, however much some of these dogmas may seem to echo certain highly figurative texts of Scripture, however much truth may be in them if they be interpreted in a non-literal sense, we must honestly characterise this teaching,—when expressed and intended to be understood in anything like the way in which modern language is understood,—as false teaching—utterly opposed to the spirit and doctrine of the Lord

Jesus Christ. It is teaching such as this that drives logical and thinking minds away from Christ and His Gospel, and often lands them in a region of darkness and despair.<sup>1</sup>

The learned Dr. Pressensé, the author of *The Early Years of Christianity*, a man of thoroughly evangelical mind, says, "The judicial theory, according to which the suffering of Christ consisted in the feeling of the rejection and wrath of God, is altogether alien to the conception of St. Paul. Impartial men who are familiar with the history will admit that this theory is so obscurely derivable from the words of St. Paul, *that for centuries the Church had no conception of it*. Paul always represents the Father as acting in harmony with the Son. 'God,' says he, 'was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself.' If He was *in* Christ, He could not be against Him. Again, This theory has against it the gravest moral objections. The law of retaliation thus receives the supreme sanction of the Cross, and forgiveness is robbed of its freeness. It is further an erroneous conception of the work of redemption which disjoins the death of the Saviour from His life. The two are closely connected—the former the consummation of the latter. His death

<sup>1</sup> The charge of Unitarianism which is often made against those who reject the popular view of the Atonement, is an utterly illogical and unfounded charge. Surely any special view which may be held upon this subject has no relation whatever to the question which characterises Unitarianism, namely, that respecting the Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

appears to us as the culminating point of the redemptive work, which comprehends His whole life upon earth."

It is a dangerous theory that we are bound to admit any doctrine into our religious faith, which is so vague and unthinkable that it cannot be made intelligible as regards the *sense* and *manner* in which it is applicable to our spiritual good. Our Father surely deals with us as intelligent beings, upon whom He will not impose any belief which is beyond our power of serviceable comprehension—or which is opposed to the best exercise of the reason and moral sense with which He has endowed us.<sup>1</sup>

Now, in the use which is made of the popular theory of the Atonement, we meet with a number of phrases which are either mere conventionalisms, not intended to be questioned or definitely understood, or else figurative and metaphorical Scripture expressions, used literally. In either case they are exceedingly perplexing to thoughtful seekers after truth.

One of these phrases (based no doubt upon our Lord's exclamation on the cross), is "the finished work of Christ." This expression when any definite meaning is sought in it, is taken to signify that our Lord finished, in His death, the work of righteousness

<sup>1</sup> "The idea (says Thomas Erskine) that anything is imposed on us by Christianity to be believed just for believing's sake, so to speak, and without any reference to the disclosure it makes of the mind of God towards us, or to its moral bearing on our character, must have a tendency to produce either infidelity or superstition."



which is to be imputed to believers. This is, we conceive, an essentially false and mischievous idea. The phrase also seems to ignore the fact that the true effect of the Atonement, the real work of Redemption, is continually going forward in the believing soul; that man can only be truly reconciled to God by being brought into willing and real harmony with Him; and that Christ manifest in the Spirit is the power that is always at work, in order to carry on this reconciliation to completeness.

"Through the merits of Christ" is an expression which to a Protestant mind will not bear investigation. It is, in truth, of Romish parentage, and implies again that the beauty of Christ's righteous life and His superabounding works of goodness are put to the credit of His disciples, according to their faith! How unreal and artificial is this doctrine by the side of the simple unmistakable teaching of the Apostle,—  
"Whoso doeth righteousness is righteous, even as Christ is righteous." Neither is the phrase, so customary at the conclusion of prayers, "for Christ's sake," nor the doctrine naturally implied in it, to be found in the New Testament. The only instance in which it occurs in the Version of 1611 is an obvious mis-translation, which is corrected in the New Version.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In the Friends' Yearly Meeting, recently held, one of the leading ministers in the Society referred to this serious error of "adding to the Truth," and spoke of the grievous mischief often thus done. He mentioned the following popular phrases as unscriptural: "*being washed in the blood of Christ*;" "*the imputed righteousness of*



In this connection, we come upon a question which needs to be both reverently and boldly handled. What is meant by "the efficacy of the blood of Christ"? The words in the popular hymn, "Let the water and the blood," &c., appeal to a gross materialistic view of the blood of Christ which has greater hold upon even intelligent Christians than could be readily supposed possible. No doubt these expressions are commonly used, and received, in that vague and indefinite way which we have already had occasion to condemn. But the phrase "the blood of Christ" is constantly construed, both as referring to an act of expiation, and as being in some mysterious way the vital principle of that act.

The shedding of the human blood of Christ is thus represented as the "procuring cause" of God's willingness to forgive sin! Sins are said to be "covered," and believers "sheltered" by the blood of Christ. But this is simply the "forensic" or substitutional view of the Atonement in a more specious, because a more highly figurative form; and this is a theory, as we have elsewhere explained, altogether out of harmony with the true nature of God, and the essential attributes of justice and mercy. It also

*Christ;" "being clothed in Christ's righteousness;" that "Christ died to satisfy the justice of God;" or that "He endured the wrath of God to avert the penalty of sin."* He concluded by saying that "although there might be in the word '*substitution*' a true thought if used in a special sense, yet in its ordinary acceptation it is unscriptural."

deals exclusively with the one aspect of the question—its relation to God the Father,—respecting which it may be said that it is an unsearchable question not needful for our salvation and beyond the scope of our intelligence.

But the other aspect of the subject—its relation to our own souls—the manner in which the blood of Christ can be said, and is said in Holy Scripture, to “cleanse from sin”—this is the practical, and for us, the vital, question. And yet it is the side which is almost ignored by the popular theory. Some people tell us that their consciences have been quieted, and the fear of punishment put away, by the acceptance of the belief that the shedding of Christ's blood on Calvary has averted the wrath of God from them, and that therefore their past sins and their still sinful state are not imputed to them.

To us, however, it appears far more reasonable and intelligible to regard the shedding of the blood of Christ not only as an utter condemnation of the sinful state which was the cause of the shedding of that blood, but also a supreme declaration of God's infinite love for sin-stricken souls—an assurance that He who thus poured out His human life for the sake of sinful men will cleanse them from sin by the “Spirit and Life” which He plainly told His disciples that His flesh and blood typified. The rescued sinner, rejoicing in this experience, has, in fact, realised that which the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews describes

as the real efficacy of the blood of Christ—his “conscience is cleansed from dead works, to serve the living God.”

Much is said about the typical character of the blood of the paschal lamb which is affirmed to have saved the Israelites in Egypt. But the question is, Was it the blood that saved them? The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews obviously implies that it was *their faith* in using the appointed emblem, and trusting in the faithfulness and power of God to protect—that saved them.

We have no desire to lessen the value and importance of the texts in which the expression “the blood of Christ” occurs. On the contrary, we seek to give it depth and reality; to suggest a practical meaning to this striking metaphor, which people can apply to their spiritual good.

If we examine the contexts and surroundings in which the phrase is used, we shall find that it often means simply the death of Christ; that crowning act of Divine Self-sacrifice for our sakes, and the pledge of God’s pardoning, restoring Love for all His repenting children. This is surely its meaning in such passages as these: “This is my blood of the New Testament which is shed for you;” “In whom we have redemption through His blood—the forgiveness of sins;” “Having made peace through the blood of His Cross;” and some others. But we consider that the aim of most of these texts is to point to the

cleansing, life-giving, and life-sustaining virtue which flows from the risen Christ into the willing hearts of men, as His life's-blood flowed on Calvary when "the Good Shepherd" gave "His life for the sheep."

This all-important truth is, we think, referred to in such texts as the following: "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life;" "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin;" "Unto Him that loved us and loosed us from our sins by His blood." With reference to all these passages, it is a question, not of acceptance or rejection, but as to whether we shall understand Eastern and Jewish teaching with modern and mere mechanical literalness; or whether we shall boldly and honestly seek for the true spiritual significance of the words.

It is often said that we must receive Scripture language "in its obvious and natural sense." Upon this very important matter, and upon the habit of building up doctrines on isolated texts, we will quote Archdeacon Farrar's trenchant words. He says: "Was not our Lord constantly, seriously, finally misunderstood alike by His enemies and His disciples, in His own life-time? Were not His literal statements evaded as being metaphors? Were not His metaphors misinterpreted as being rigid facts? . . . To assert that the popular sense in which special sayings of His, or of His Apostles, have been understood must be their

sole true sense, is to ignore all the lessons of Christian history. Has not the sense of hundreds of passages of Scripture been sought by earnest investigation, as to the results of which there has been a difference among Christians in all ages? Of the famous verse, 'Now a Mediator is not a Mediator of one, but God is one,' we have three hundred different explanations!

"Are we to accept the whole doctrine of Transubstantiation because of the words 'This is my body'?

"Are we to accept the supremacy of the Pope because of the words 'Thou art Peter, and on this rock will I build my Church'?

"Are we to revive the ruthless trials for witchcraft because Moses said 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live'?

"Are we to repeat the horrible crimes of religious persecution because of the words 'Compel them to come in'?

"Are we, because Christ said that He came 'to give His life a ransom for many,' to believe, as the majority of Christians seem to have believed, for nearly a thousand years, that this ransom was paid to the devil?

"Are we to accept in all its horror the entire Calvinistic system of reprobation because Paul quoted the verse 'Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated'?

"Yet all these words have thus, 'by millions upon millions,' been misinterpreted and misunderstood; and

I suppose that many of these millions, in thus misunderstanding them, supposed themselves to be acting 'dutifully,' and taking them 'in their obvious meaning.'"

There are, indeed, as Archdeacon Farrar intimates, hundreds of texts which no sensible man, who honestly wishes to believe in the Bible, ever thinks of interpreting literally. *Literal interpretation is the one well understood device of dishonest sceptics and scoffers.* In this way it is very easy to discredit the Bible; and thus, in fact, many Christians do thoughtlessly dishonour it.<sup>1</sup>

That the life and death of Christ have had a mysterious power which we can never fully comprehend in this life, to overcome and to ward off evil and to work salvation, many passages of Scripture undoubtedly indicate. But whatever, in the deep purposes of God—"the Atonement" may be, we cannot regard it as **Expiation**, nor the suffering of punishment vicariously, in any literal sense. It is not the expression of God's anger against sinners, much less against His well-beloved Son in their stead.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is especially strange to find some "Friends," who reject the literal meanings of various texts, upon which other religious bodies base the observances of Water-baptism and the Lord's Supper, clinging with unreasoning tenacity to the utmost literalism with reference to the expressions which relate to the blood of Christ.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Erskine says: "I am aware that the doctrine of Expiation through the vicarious death of Christ is sacred and precious to the hearts of many, nevertheless I am compelled to regard it as a human invention, opposed to the true character of God."



It is certainly not, in any of its aspects or bearings, contrary to our best sense of moral right or justice; nor in its main characteristics can it be otherwise than reasonably intelligible as regards its practical application to our soul's needs. It is a special work wrought by the compassion of God for mankind; but still in perfect conformity with the universal code of spiritual law which has been in operation from all eternity. If it "satisfied the justice of God" it is, as the Apostle says, "that He may be just and the Justifier of him that believes in Jesus." In other words, it is a "just,"—that is, a righteous and faithful thing—on the part of God, to provide in Christ this means of assurance and of help for His dependent children.

If, in the beautifully figurative language of oriental antiquity "we are not our own, but are bought with a price," do we need to degrade and materialise the Apostle's thought into a commercial transaction between the Father and the Son? How, even in modern phrase, is "experience bought"? Does it require any strain whatever of the imaginative faculty, to understand from the text simply this: that since our Lord has done and suffered so much on our account, we are bound to consider ourselves, from motives of love and gratitude, *His*, to command, to use—in a word, to possess?

In concluding this first paper on the Atonement, we would especially desire to point out to those who have been building more or less upon the theological expressions against which we have protested, that these

dogmas are in no degree necessary to a true faith in Christ. In fact, that *without them*, we may arrive at a far worthier and more satisfying conception of the reconciling, self-sacrificing Love *alike of the Father and the Son*—that flowed, and will for ever flow, for the healing and cleansing of the nations, from the cross of Christ.

In the following paper we propose to consider what is the true meaning of the Atonement, and what are its objects and purposes, in the Redemption of Mankind.

NOTE.—In a very suggestive little book on the Atonement, recently published (*Hulsean Lectures for 1883 and 1884*), we have the following from the pen of a competent scholar, the Rev. J. J. Lias, M.A. He says, "Sometimes meanings are imported into a passage which exist only in the mind of a translator. The literal translation of Isaiah liii. verses 4-6, is as follows:

*'Surely our diseases (or griefs) He hath borne (or taken away, the word has both senses). . . . And our sorrows, He hath borne them, but as for us, we looked on Him as one stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But He was pierced (or made to suffer) for our offences, He was crushed (or bruised) by our iniquities, the chastisement (the word signifies disciplinary punishment) of our peace was on Him, and with His stripes healing was imparted to us. All we like sheep had gone astray, we had turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath caused to fall (or light) on Him the iniquity of us all.'*

"It may be observed," continues the author, "that though the particle translated 'for' in the Authorized Version in the passage 'He was wounded for our offences,' has sometimes that meaning, it has far more often the meaning 'by,' and still more often the sense of 'from' (in the sense of the cause)."

Our readers cannot fail to see what a wonderful difference is made by these apparently slight verbal alterations in the literal sense of this often-quoted passage.



## THE ATONEMENT ;

### WHAT IS ITS TRUE MEANING ?

“It is God’s *Free Grace* that remits and blots out sin ; of which the death of Christ and His sacrificing Himself was a most certain declaration and confirmation. This was not for the pacifying of God, but of man’s conscience, as to past sin.”—WILLIAM PENN.

“The object of the Atonement is not to alter anything in God’s eternal nature, for that is Love ; but in man’s consciousness of Him.”—CHEVALIER BUNSEN.

It is remarkable that this word “Atonement,” which has become the very shibboleth of Evangelical Christianity, is really not found in the New Testament at all ! In the only place in which our English version of 1611 introduced it (Rom. v. 11), it is now replaced by “reconciliation.”

In this simple fact we evidently find the key to the true meaning of the doctrine. *It ought, in Christian language to be called the doctrine of Reconciliation, and not of Atonement.*

It is true that the word “Atonement” occurs frequently in the earlier part of the Old Testament ; and there it is perhaps not altogether inappropriate—

even allowing it some degree of the forced significance which it seems almost inevitably to acquire. The very imperfection and merely symbolic character of the Jewish ritualistic system, is, so to speak, the explanation and apology for its use. But this fact renders its absence from the later revelation the more conspicuous and instructive. It pointedly suggests that the Christian conception of the equivalent idea must be something very different—a nobler and truer doctrine.

In the former paper we have endeavoured to point out chiefly what the Atonement is *not*; to analyse some common views of the subject which seem to be both morally and logically wrong. In considering the true meaning of the doctrine,—the sense in which it can be received as a Christian doctrine at all, we offer the following suggestions; not, of course, as a complete or exhaustive view (so profound and in some respects unsearchable is the theme), but as indicating a safe and helpful line of thought.

Looking, then, at this great question, as far as possible in all its bearings, it presents itself to our minds thus:—God, our Father, being full of love to His wandering and degraded children, seeks to win them back to Himself, to assure them of a welcome, to lift up and restore them, and to make them—of their own willing and intelligent choice—spiritually healthful, self-denying and law-abiding. For this purpose He manifests Himself

in the person of Jesus Christ, who lives a human life; submitting to the restraints and trials of *our* nature; bearing the ingratitude, self-will, and enmity of men; and finally, in steadfast pursuit of His gracious purpose, suffering, at their hands, a cruel and humiliating death.

Here, *in the Incarnation*, in the whole manifestation of the love and gracious purposes of God which the career of the Lord Jesus upon the earth displayed, in His deeds and teaching and promises, as well as in His death and resurrection, was the true At-one-ment. Here was the Father's hand of forgiving love and help (in conjunction with a marvellous exhibition of Divine wisdom and holiness), manifestly stretched out for the deliverance of the human race. It is thus by the power of self-sacrificing love, and by the revelation of a perfect human life, that He seeks to attract the aspirations and affections, and to recover the obedience of men, without destroying their free-will. It is thus that He brings home to penitent and submissive souls the assurance of forgiveness and help and salvation, and opens in human hearts a channel of tenderness, gratitude and love, through which the stream of His grace may effectually reach them, to rescue and redeem, whilst at the same time asserting with supreme force the deadly nature of sin, and the full and free character of His forgiving mercy.

This, surely, is a purpose and a result, worthy of a God of Love! But what an entirely different thing

it is from that popular definition of the Doctrine of the Atonement which we will here reproduce by way of contrast. It says in effect, "*God is angry, and must be propitiated: God is just, and cannot forgive unless some one pay the penalty. Christ, therefore, has intervened and borne the Father's wrath, and paid the penalty due from guilty sinners; and now for Christ's sake, God forgives! The sins of mankind have been attributed to Christ, and He has been punished, and His righteousness, if we believe, will now be imputed to us, and thus we may be saved!*" How contrary is all this to the beautiful winning spirit of God's reconciling love in Christ, as recorded in the Gospels!

Nowhere have we the real meaning of Atonement (reconciliation) more beautifully taught than in the parable of the Prodigal Son. We see no heathen idea of propitiation there: no being compassionate for the sake of another; no substitution. The father is not represented as angry with his wayward and sinful, but penitent son, though the son evidently expects that he will be so. Surely it is the far-reaching power of the father's love that finds him out in the distant country, and draws him back to himself. It is the father's love that runs out to meet him, and welcomes him home as a forgiven and rescued child, who has still his appointed place in that home, and for whom a most beneficent discipline is provided in the daily life of filial love and willing service.

Let us now present the teaching of this beautiful

parable conjointly with that of the text that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself," in another picture of the alienated condition and rescue of the human race. That race, gifted far beyond all God's other creatures upon earth with intellectual and spiritual faculties, with noble aspirations, and with the god-like power of free choice and action; but having, at the same time, a lower nature striving for the mastery, had given themselves up, in great measure, to this latter degrading tendency. They had broken through the family bond, renounced or never realised their life of filial service, and wandered away from God, until they found themselves shut up in dreary regions of sensual and selfish thought and feeling: truly illustrating the words, "having no hope, and without God in the world." With moral faculties darkened and benumbed, their position resembled that of those Arctic navigators, about whose fate such intense anxiety has sometimes been aroused. Utterly unable to extricate or save themselves, the moral and spiritual condition of mankind became, as time wore on, more and more terrible and hopeless. Then, in this dire extremity, the Lord of Life appeared, "travailing in the greatness of His strength—mighty to save." Entirely identifying Himself with the human race—so as best to win His way to their hearts—a man amongst men, exposed to the same assaults; having, like them, the free power of choice, and like them, seeing spiritual things by the eye of Faith, His whole

being was yet lovingly yielded to His Father's will, and His whole soul set upon accomplishing, at whatever cost, the work of restoration.

Recognising all the laws that affect human life and using them for the accomplishment of His merciful purpose, the result, in conformity with those laws, could not be attained without much suffering. Through the mountains of accumulated snow and ice, the opposing forces of ignorance and of evil, wounded and weary, the great Deliverer pressed forward with unfaltering steps to the crowning triumph of His love. He had come "to seek and to save that which was lost—to find out those that sat in darkness and the shadow of death—to guide their feet into the way of peace." But the work was not completed until the greatest manifestation of even Divine love had been displayed. The last opposition could be overcome only by the surrender, amidst unutterable suffering of His human life.

But then, "Death was swallowed up in victory." The prisoners were reached, the succour carried. The obstacles which man, by his wilfulness and rebellion, had placed between himself and his loving Father, had been overcome—"a new and living way" of escape provided. The door was set open, more plainly than it had ever been before—for God's children to return home. The glorious Deliverer saw of the travail of His Soul, its blessed and far-reaching results, and was satisfied !



Another illustration of the true character of <sup>this</sup> saving work is found in the words of a well-known hymn :—

“ But none of the ransomed ever knew  
How deep were the waters crossed,  
Or how dark the night that the Lord passed through  
Ere He found His sheep that was lost !  
‘ Lord ! whence are those blood-drops all the way  
That marked the mountain track ? ’  
‘ They were shed for one who had gone astray,  
Ere the Shepherd could bring him back. ’ ”

In these varied pictures of the rescue of the wanderer, we have sought to indicate an aspect of the Atonement which we think is not sufficiently dwelt upon. Let us make no mistake in this point. The aim of this part of Christ's work was *restoration*, not *expiation* ; and the means used were necessary, not to propitiate the Father, but to reach the heart of the wanderer, to open a way for his return, and to assure him of God's forgiving love. The sufferings and death of Christ are not to be spoken of as penal or substitutional, any more than we should speak of the toils and the privations of the shepherd seeking his lost sheep as penal or substitutional, or than we should describe the sufferings of the rescuing party in the Arctic regions by such terms. In the words of Dr. Fairbairn, “ Christ's death declared that man's sin meant God's suffering ; and that God could not lose the soul.”

It would be easy further to confirm these views

by the broad scope and tenor of the teaching of the Bible. To arrive at this teaching, however, we must not dwell unduly upon isolated texts, and we must be careful not to literalise and misuse those strong eastern figures of speech which are so largely employed by the sacred writers. It is a fundamental principle in interpreting Scripture, that the spirit and teaching of *the whole* should be considered. Then—bearing in mind, of course, its varied and progressive character, and intelligently estimating the sense intended by the inspired penmen—the way in which we may reasonably suppose they would have expressed themselves if they had been writing in English in the nineteenth century—we are convinced that their testimony will be found to be in harmony with the views we have here expressed.

At the risk of repetition, but as necessarily bearing on this aspect of the subject, we would again point out that many of the terms used in portraying the redeeming work of Christ, have to be considered from a human stand-point alone, and as simply descriptive of the effect of this work upon the soul of man. Such terms as ransom, mediation, advocate, and propitiation, are of this class. The freedom which the restored and forgiven wanderer enjoys is fitly compared to the delightful liberty of the prisoner who has been unexpectedly rescued by a ransom, or delivered through the intercession of a mediator. But our Heavenly Father needs no ransom *in the literal sense of the word*,



in order to induce Him to rescue His penitent children, who have *made themselves* prisoners by their sins. He requires no mediator nor advocate, as it were in a legal sense, to win Him back to *their* side. He needs no "propitiation" in the strict meaning of the word: for His fatherly and gracious nature is full of love to His children. Surely Christ does not propitiate the Father! But He makes manifest to men that God is propitious and kind and pitiful, "not willing that any should perish."

It is a matter of the greatest significance, in which it appears to us principles are involved which subsequent revelations only further illustrate, that in numerous instances, all through the Bible, men are represented to have been forgiven and restored, on sincere repentance and amendment of life, without any reference to substitutional atonement. Call to mind that our Lord Himself repeatedly forgave sins, before His crucifixion, on the same grounds of penitence and faith; thus declaring, unmistakably, that these are the supremely needful conditions. Consider, too, His most significant illustration of the very nature and essence of forgiveness, in the teaching that unless we forgive *from the heart* the trespasses or offences of our fellow men, neither will our Heavenly Father forgive us. Surely His forgiveness is as willing, as "free," as little needing a "victim" to obtain it, as He requires man's to be! If our brother sin against us seven times a day, and seven times a day turn to

us, saying, "I repent," we are to forgive him. But it is represented that God will not, nay, cannot, forgive us upon like terms. Some even tell us that to obtain His pardon we must understand and accept a certain formula about substitution and propitiation with reference to the procuring of this forgiveness (which, strange to say, they still call "free"), and that unless we accept it upon these precise terms, we cannot have it! In this strait, we are constrained to set aside the dogmas of the theologians, and trust with entire confidence the *genuinely free* forgiving love of our Heavenly Father as exhibited to us abundantly in the life and teaching and death of the Redeemer.

In further explanation of a large amount of Scripture language in reference to this subject, observe also that it is Jewish teaching, written specially in the first place for the benefit of Jews, in conformity with their accustomed modes of thought and feeling. The Judæo-Christian Church,—even the Apostles themselves who remained at Jerusalem,—were slow to renounce the Mosaic Ceremonial Law, the obligations of which upon Jewish converts were never formally annulled. They therefore attended the daily temple-services and still believed in the priestly and sacrificial rites, apparently not yet understanding that the Great High Priest had put an end to those primeval and hitherto universal systems which represented only imperfect human conceptions, and which had so largely failed to declare either the real nature of the goodness

and love and "tender mercy" of The Most High, or the exceeding sinfulness, the essentially soul-degrading character, of the sin which had to be "put away."<sup>1</sup>

For the sake, then, of Jewish converts, it was expedient that the Christian faith should be thus temporarily linked on to their venerated symbolical institutions, on the Divine method of continuity and development.

With regard to the expediency in certain cases of the temporary use of familiar habits of thought and expression, even though not contemplated as ultimate or perfect forms, it is interesting to note the testimony and practice of the Apostle Paul. He confesses that he "became all things to all men, that he might by all means save some." *To the Jews he became as a Jew*; but to those who were without (the Mosaic) law, as himself without it. He was a "Hebrew of the Hebrews"; his mind was saturated with Jewish thought, and his language was naturally cast in the same mould. Even he—and yet more obviously the other apostles, as we have elsewhere shown, were still largely influenced by the strong national feeling for the Mosaic Ritual. Their own minds were, perhaps, but gradually

<sup>1</sup> But surely it is only to carry forward "the weakness and unprofitableness" of the Old Dispensation into the New, to reckon that Christ "puts away sin by the sacrifice of Himself," in any case in which the sinful state remains. If that state still remain in any heart, there the sin is not "put away," notwithstanding the fact of the accomplished sacrifice of Christ, and the most sincere belief on the part of the sinner, of its historical truth.

opening to a full conception of the degree in which the spirit and scope of the Gospel superseded the Law. They therefore used the familiar sacrificial terms (sparingly, however, in addressing the Churches which had large Gentile elements), but they sought to give these terms a spiritual significance and application. Their teaching tended to wean Jewish and Gentile converts alike, from the old materialistic conceptions, and to bring them to some understanding of the deeper and truer meanings of their equivalents in the Christian faith; to lead gently away from the old dispensation to the new: not so much to substitute another set of formal dogmas and definitions of truth as to turn men "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God," through faith in a living Saviour, Christ Jesus the Lord.

To the whole Gentile world Paul preached simply, but completely, Christ! Christ, as God manifest in the flesh; Christ crucified, and even more frequently perhaps, Christ risen. Christ, the wisdom of God and the power of God. He set before them Christ the self-sacrificed, but not the victim; the Saviour from the power rather than from the punishment of sin, the Revealer of the love, not of the wrath, of God.

But the principal key to the real meaning of Scripture in this matter is the recognition of its obviously and strikingly figurative character. As an example and illustration of this, we may adduce the passage in Matthew viii. 17. "Himself took our

infirmities and bare our sicknesses." This was quoted by the Evangelist from the Prophet Isaiah, as referring to Christ's miracles of healing people of their bodily sickness. Yet it is obvious that Christ did not literally take these diseases upon Himself.

*In just such a sense, surely, did He bear our sins*; not, of course, actually transferring them to Himself—having no implication whatever, either in their moral guilt, or its alienating consequences—yet really bearing them by His intense sympathy; freeing people from them and healing them spiritually by His divine power.

So, too, of the blood of Christ: we have not only "to be cleansed" by it, but we have *to drink it*! The latter injunction is even more authoritative and emphatic than the former. But then, in reference to this very matter, we have the plain explanation from our Lord Himself that the expression was simply a metaphor; "The flesh (that is, the material element, including *of necessity* the blood) profits nothing. My words are spirit and life"; in other words they are figurative; the truths to which they refer are purely spiritual.

In this, as in all His teaching, the Saviour presupposes and expects from men the exercise of some reasonable degree of intelligence and common sense; and yet, notwithstanding that in this very instance He has generously added a clear explanation, a certain—and we fear it must at present be said, the popular—school of theologians persist in teaching that it is



the literal blood of the human body of Christ that cleanses from sin! We conceive that this is, perhaps, the most palpable instance of a want of both intellectual and spiritual discernment that ecclesiastical history can show.

And now, for another foundation-stone of the true theory of the Atonement, let us have recourse again to our Lord's own words. They are to the very point, clearly intelligible, and therefore of the utmost value. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." Do not these words make it clear that it is the supreme power with which the cross of Christ inspires feelings of gratitude and love and confidence, that constitutes the great feature of the Atonement? It is, in fact, the very strongest influence that even Divine wisdom has ever devised or put into operation to gain the willing and loving allegiance and subjection of mankind. But even this is not all. The degree in which the self-sacrifice of Christ emphasises the Divine sympathy with the terrible need of sinful man, and pledges the acceptance through penitence and faith of every returning wanderer, is infinitely assuring. *And lastly, the cross is the crowning testimony of God's abhorrence of sin.* If it had not been for the sin of the world, there would have been no crucifixion. Therefore it is literally as a sacrifice for (on account of) sin that Christ suffered.

We conclude, then, that the true meaning of the doctrine, whatever we may call it (only recollect that

"The Atonement" is not a New Testament phrase at all, but is an invention of the "schoolmen" of the middle ages, in reference to the death of Christ) practically this:—

That by a sincere and penitent recognition of our personal share in the sin of the world, for (on account of) which Christ died upon the cross, and by a grateful acceptance of the forgiving love and help so signally manifested and proffered to us, in the life and death and by the gracious promises of the Lord Jesus Christ, the sins of the past are consciously felt and intellectually understood to be forgiven: whilst at the same time our sense of "the exceeding sinfulness of sin" is greatly intensified and deepened: and we are taught that it is not by the merit of any works of righteousness that we have done, but in the exercise of God's free mercy and love, that we are reconciled to Him, and made recipients of His salvation, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

## THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST.

"Faith in Christ's love is a higher thing than faith in anything whereby He has manifested His love. It is faith in Himself, and what He is, and not merely in what He did or suffered."—NORMAN McLEOD.

"The principal efficacy of this redeeming work was not in the pain and torture of the Cross, it was not in the blood that streamed down from His wounds, but in the Divine Love, the self-sacrifice, the magnanimity, the forgiveness, the compassion of which the blood was an expression, and of which the life and death were the fulfilment."—DEAN STANLEY.

"A MAN of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." That is certainly a remarkable chapter in Isaiah which describes, with marvellous prophetic insight, the sorrowful side of the Redeemer's life and its results—"the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." We see here, in strong outline and in vivid poetic colouring, the sublime picture of Divine self-sacrifice endured for the everlasting good of the human race. Let us reverently consider this aspect of the Saviour's life upon earth.

In regard to ourselves, suffering is commonly accepted by religious people as part of the needful



discipline of life. It is recognised as one form of that true Baptism—the baptism of fire; and as being, often, the appointed means in the Divine hand for working those spiritual miracles that are still to be witnessed—the opening of blind eyes, the healing of paralysed souls, the restoration of child-like tenderness to hardened, unfeeling hearts.

Thus suffering, mental and physical, is not only a necessary and purifying discipline for teachable and trustful souls; it is also the severe, but still merciful, means by which men who will accept no milder remedy, are taught to reverence the laws of God. Disease, famine, war, and many other of the calamities and evils under which the world groans are very largely the direct consequences of the breaking of God's laws. The annals of the human race are one continuous and sad record of the fact that, unless men will use the intelligence and the spiritual and moral perceptions with which God has endowed them, they *must*, sooner or later, pay the penalty. Sin and suffering are inseparable. Here then, are two aspects of the subject—the “trouble” to which, for their good, from the days of Job and before, even righteous men “are born, as the sparks fly upward,” and the suffering (also meant to be remedial) which wicked men bring upon themselves. And upon both these accounts it was needful, not for His own sake but for ours, that the Great Restorer should share our lot. In all our afflictions

He was afflicted, and the angel of His sympathising Presence saves and strengthens us.

It is surprising that any should fail to recognise both the wisdom and mercy of God, in stretching out to us, as it were from Heaven, this veritable hand of flesh and blood, that we may see it plainly, and not fear to take hold of it.

His purpose in coming as a "man of sorrows" was doubtless to show Himself, not only as a Saviour, but as a companion and sympathiser. "It behoved Him to be made perfect through suffering." Not that suffering could add anything to the perfections of a Being who was in Himself essentially good, but it could in many ways perfect *His relation to us*. Christ's sufferings touch the heart of mankind at a point which is nearest to that of contrition and love. Weak faith, if it can believe anything, can believe self-denial such as this; can lean upon sympathy *that suffers freely to save*.

With our thoughts of Christ's human life, of His sympathies and feelings, it is impossible to avoid associating our knowledge of His self-conscious Divinity. But we must not allow this knowledge to obscure the fact of His real temptable, thoroughly human manhood. He was tempted and tried as we are (but more subtly, according to the possibilities of His position). He suffered as we do (but more keenly in proportion as His "knowledge of good and evil" was greater, and His sympathies

wider and deeper than ours), in order that the tempted and sorrowing sons and daughters of men might be assured that they "have in Him a faithful and merciful High Priest who can be touched with a feeling of their infirmities" and sorrows. They hear His often-recurring words, "I have compassion"—as He stood face to face with human misery and need: they see the tears He shed by the grave of His friend at Bethany: they behold the Divine pity which beamed upon the dying robber, through the agony of the Cross; and they can rejoice in the certainty that nothing less tender and affectionate and forgiving awaits their own needs. We thank God from the bottom of our hearts for the assurance of Divine pity and sympathy which we find in the sufferings of Christ.

Probably thoughtful people are accustomed to associate the idea of suffering during His life principally with mental conditions—"the contradiction of sinners," and the sense which so holy and all-discerning a Being must continually have had of the sin of the world. There is no record of His enduring physical suffering except in connection with His death. It is not to be supposed that He incurred serious privation and want. "The Son of man hath not where to lay His head" does not, in an Eastern country, imply destitution. He was poor, no doubt, and lived a life of the greatest simplicity and frugality. But He was no ascetic, and never courted



suffering for its own sake. Indeed, there is obviously much to be said about the happiness, the rejoicing, the glory, the Divine peace, that must often have filled the Saviour's human heart. His life was certainly the happiest life ever spent upon earth, because the only sinless one, the only perfectly trustful one. It is difficult to conceive of a time in which His inmost soul was not filled with the "perfect peace" of God. It is true that He suffered much: but cannot thousands of His followers testify that as their sufferings have abounded, so have their peace and rejoicing much more abounded? Are not times of sickness and bereavement, and of the most intense affliction, the very opportunities which God often chooses to pour into human hearts His most healing and substantial joys? The agony in the garden of Gethsemane brought down an angel to strengthen and cheer: and so, everlastingly, does submissive and sanctified human woe, undergone "according to the will of God," bring the Divine Comforter Himself to the sufferer's side. "If we die with Christ we shall also live, if we suffer we shall also reign with Him;" as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. His purpose in suffering for us is that we may be partakers of His joy. Men may have the suffering, if they will, without the joy, but they cannot have the joy without the suffering. *Both* were perfected in Christ.

A great revolution was introduced into the religious world by the humble earthly career, the sufferings and the teaching of Christ. The thought, even in religious minds, notwithstanding the partial teaching of the Book of Job, had previously been, "Let the wicked suffer in this world, and let the righteous prosper and rejoice." The Messiah was expected by the Jews to be a great and powerful King who should reign in outward splendour and give prosperity and grandeur to their nation. These ideas, the whole life and the early ignominious death of the Redeemer were calculated to correct. He taught that His kingdom and the inheritance of His followers was not chiefly upon the earth, and that it is through much tribulation that we must enter that kingdom; so that the "sword" which He told His disciples He was come to send them instead of the kind of peace they expected—the "fiery trial" through which they had to pass,—might not seem "a strange thing" to them. It was enough for the servants that they should be as their Lord. Unspeakably valuable as this lesson is through all time, we can see how especially comforting and strengthening must have been His companionship in suffering in those times, when the disciples were called upon to suffer, many of them even unto death, as He had been. We hold, then, that the sufferings of Christ can be fully understood and explained without resorting to the popular substitutional theories which represent these

sufferings as a payment of the debt incurred by mankind through sin, and as an equivalent for the punishment due to sin.

In the first place this idea of sin being in any reasonably literal sense a *debt* to the Father is a strangely false and confusing one. It is true that the figure was used by our Lord in a parable, but it has there an altogether different reference, and will not bear for a moment any *literal* application to the relation of a sinful soul to God. It is used solely in illustration of the nature of *free and hearty forgiveness* without any payment or "satisfaction" whatever, either by the debtor or by any one else on his account. And in this, its obviously intended meaning, the parable itself may be used to refute all substitutional theories of the Atonement. We submit that there is no ground whatever, either in reason or in Scripture, for the idea that Christ by His sufferings on the cross "paid the debt" due by sinful men to the Father. And further, that there is no shadow of necessity, in the nature of the case, for such a supposition.

With regard to the other point,—that the death of Christ upon the cross was an equivalent for the punishment due to the sins of men; and that the Saviour actually thus suffered that penalty in our stead—questions arise which need to be handled with reverence and care, but with no less fidelity to truth and reason.



So far from desiring to minimise the nature and degree of the suffering He endured, we find it difficult to express our sense of its magnitude and intensity. Remembering that it was perfectly foreseen; that at all events for a long period previously, and probably throughout His adult life, the final agony must have been, more or less, an ever-present thought, what is the reasonable supposition as to the saddening effect on a human life of such a consciousness? Then on the near approach of the event, think of the scene in the garden of Gethsemane and of those most pathetic and most human words, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me;" and lastly, that most barbarous Roman invention—crucifixion!—purposely made as agonising a death as human ingenuity could devise. The thickening of that heavy veil of the flesh—even to blinding—ere it was rent! the mortal agony out of which were uttered those awfully descriptive words (quoted from the twenty-second Psalm) "My God! my God! why hast Thou forsaken me?" It would be very difficult to add anything to all this of the possibilities of human suffering.

But now it becomes necessary to inquire what is the real nature and *value* of physical suffering and death?

It is a strangely crude and thoughtless idea that the death of the body is *the* penalty of sin. Is it not rather the means by which we enter a far

happier and higher state of existence? An immortality, or indefinite continuance, in this present condition of being would in the very nature of things be both undesirable and impossible. And it is equally impossible to assign any supreme importance in itself to physical suffering, however severe. In some shape or other it is the common lot. There is nothing clearer in the lessons which experience and observation teach than this, that mere physical suffering, the "light afflictions" (ridicule, scorn, persecution, imprisonment, bodily agony, and death in every form of barbarity, are what the Apostle refers to) "which are but for a moment," are in themselves of but small account. Except as reminders of God's laws and as evidences both of His justice and His love, *they are not suffered, and cannot possibly in any case be suffered as equivalents for spiritual punishment, being of a totally different character.* Let us say reverently that the physical pain which our Lord so graciously endured for our sakes was similar in kind to that which has been patiently and submissively borne by thousands whom He has strengthened by His grace. The supposition that it was incurred as an equivalent for the spiritual punishment due to mankind for their sins, simply confuses two utterly distinct conditions; since physical pain and bodily death cannot in the nature of things be any counter-balance for moral guilt, nor for the kind of punishment which sin chiefly incurs.



The apostle Peter makes fine catholic use of the sufferings of Christ, in his first Epistle. "For Christ hath also suffered for sins, the just for the unjust," (not to spare men the suffering which must always and everlastingly accompany a sinful state, but) "*that He might bring us to God.*" We are even "to fill up what is behind of the sufferings of Christ." Then, "Rejoice that as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." Suffering is hard to bear patiently and in such a spirit that it shall "bring forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness." Only the grace and sweet example of the Lord can effect this. Afflictions harden and embitter the wicked and faithless man. They purify and bless the penitent and teachable.

So then, whilst rejecting on various grounds the popular view of the purpose of Christ's sufferings, we acknowledge that they must needs have been endured for a great practical object, *as regards the condition of our own souls.* They form, in fact, a part of the *true mediatorial* work of the Redeemer: a work which is really *mediatorial* only in its office and purpose "to bring us," in penitence and faith, "to God": to believe in His love and mercy, and to trust Him heartily in all the dispensations of His providence. In contemplating the sublime self-sacrificing death of the Saviour, we feel that the calamities and sorrows which beset human life are no longer

overwhelming. We have in Christ a conquering and consoling Companion and Helper, who has Himself triumphed over them all. Henceforth, there is no sting even in death, no victory in the grave! "Nay, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through Him that hath loved us."

So full of purpose and of teaching, of consolation and strength, of human sympathy and Divine power, is this wonderful chapter of Sacred history, "The Sufferings of Christ!"

## INSPIRATION AND REVELATION ; THE BIBLE.

“It is the same Spirit which has embodied truth in the Bible, which infuses love of truth and perception of truth into the Christian. . . . In this grand endowment of an indwelling Spirit we have more than a compensation for any fallibility of the letter.”—F. MYERS.

It is well to look closely into words which have become conventional, and see what they are really intended to represent. Unless frequently questioned, and their true meanings ascertained, such words are apt to become distorting media, leading to narrowness of vision and to serious misconception. Let us then carefully consider the two words at the head of this paper.

Inspiration has been well defined to be “the immediate action of the Divine Spirit upon the human mind: the presence of God in the soul to illumine it.” Revelation is the effect of this enlightening process in making known things otherwise unseen and unimagined by the natural man.

We cannot doubt that all men are more or less

“inspired”; according to the grand old declaration, “there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding.” God is the God of the heathen as well as of the Hebrew and Christian: He is the true Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. Thus every approach which a “heathen” sage—Socrates or Buddha, for instance—made towards moral and religious truth must have been to that extent a true inspiration.

We would give, then, to these words, Inspiration and Revelation, a far wider application than that which confines them exclusively to the sacred writings; and in reference to the Bible, we would give them a simpler significance.

As regards the Bible, what is it that we hold to be inspired? Are the actual words of the Book, Divine words, and did the men who wrote them lose their individuality and become “not agents but instruments,” not penmen but pens? Were they miraculously controlled in thought and word, so that their work contains no trace of human imperfection either of knowledge or expression?

Probably something like this fairly represents the long-standing popular idea on this subject. Yet it is plain that we have here in more or less pronounced form the theory of verbal or plenary inspiration—a theory which may be said to be neither scriptural nor reasonable, and which perhaps very few thoughtful persons are now prepared definitely to uphold. But



upon this subject how little of thoughtfulness and how much of blind traditional belief have usually prevailed! Probably this has been chiefly due to the fact that such questions have been considered to lie beyond the range of legitimate inquiry. The Bible being commonly called "The Word of God," the idea is fostered by this expression, and in various other ways, from very infancy, that it is not allowable to think of it as open to any sort of criticism or verification—as to its real character or objects. There it is—one concrete "Word," all literally and equally true: all inspired, all of equal value; no human element about it, no trace of imperfection or incompleteness!

The number, however, of those who hold such views is doubtless relatively much smaller than was once the case. Probably those who take independent, yet reverent and scriptural views of this and other religious questions, are a steadily increasing body. Thoughtfulness and liberality of sentiment are often less conspicuous and demonstrative than narrowness and bigotry. None the less is it true that the former tendencies are silently moulding and controlling the religion of the world. This is one of the great hopes of an unsettled and verifying age. For assuredly an intelligent and reasonable estimate of the Bible—such a view as will bear the scrutiny of devout, but free and honest inquiry, is that which will best commend it to the continued acceptance and use of mankind; will take the keenest weapon out of the hands of its adver-

series, and minister greatly to the help and satisfaction of multitudes of its real friends.

The most prominent and most frequently reiterated arguments with which sceptics assault the Christian profession are such as they direct, not in reality against the Bible, but against the false dogmas and assumptions with which Christians themselves have invested it. These dogmas and assumptions have driven thousands into infidelity. Multitudes who would gladly have believed, have, all too hastily, taken it for granted that the Bible does teach much against which their own moral instincts and perceptions rebel.

What then are the facts about the Bible? What is it?

A large proportion of it is History: chiefly the history of one nation and of its prominent men—through whom The Most High elected to reveal and to transmit a knowledge of Himself in the early ages of the world: and much—perhaps most, of the Revelation the Bible contains is conveyed in this form. Then there are a number of poems—some of them hymns of thanksgiving—others spirited political addresses on national sins and national duties; all abounding in the boldest forms of Oriental symbolism. Then follow the Gospels, those unequalled and most precious Biographies of the only perfect Life ever lived upon the earth, and the series of Epistles addressed by Apostles, and perhaps others, to the early Churches; and lastly, there is the

mysterious and prophetic prose poem, "The Book of Revelation."

Now all this matter, so exceedingly various in its character and in the degree in which spiritual truth is embodied in and revealed by it (some considerable portions of the older books can scarcely be said to convey any distinct religious or spiritual teaching at all), it has become the fashion to call *the* Revelation, and even "The Word of God." But these terms the Bible nowhere claims for itself, and we have no hesitation in disclaiming them.

In regard to the authority of these records, so far as religious truth is concerned—we admit that the writers were specially and very largely inspired by that same Holy Spirit who influences and enlightens in various degrees all the children of men. These "sacred writers" were evidently gifted, for the benefit of the whole human race, *with a remarkable power of spiritual apprehension*: in other respects, they wrote, for the most part, under the ordinary conditions of human authorship.

The inspiration of the Apostles, for instance, was not independent of their outward knowledge of the earlier Scriptures, and of the facts of Gospel history. Was it not chiefly an increased enlightenment of their understandings in regard to these facts—their real significance and right application? On the other hand, it did not necessarily include universal knowledge, or true mental philosophy or perfect logic, or

an infallible judgment as to the tendencies and possibilities of things. "We are not bound," says Canon Farrar, "to accept St. Paul's metaphysics, however heartily we may appreciate his revelations of spiritual truth."

Doubtless Divine communications of an "outward" character—that is, cognisable to the senses—have been made to chosen men, especially in very early times when they were evidently necessary introductions to a certain knowledge of God, and to a firm basis of faith. Yet neither the Bible itself nor any inference of sound reason would lead us to suppose that the ordinary mode by which the holy men of old were moved by the Holy Ghost was, in its essential nature, different from the like influence by which good and holy men are still visited, and by which they are still to a large extent endowed with insight into the things of God, and with power to communicate them to their fellow men. There is abundant evidence that the sacred writers made full use of their natural perceptions and faculties in the preparation of these records, and that as was to be expected, the fallible human element found its way, and left its mark. We may even go so far as to say that this human element in the Bible ought really to be regarded as a providential means for saving the Church from gross idolatry—the superstitious worship of the letter, in place of the intelligent and hearty acceptance of the life-giving Spirit of Him of whom it testifies, and under whose



power and guidance its spiritual truths were proclaimed.

Doubtless the sacred writers were accustomed to relate incidents and historical occurrences as they learned them from the ordinary sources of information. Their character as highly conscientious and truthful men is sufficient guarantee of their general purpose. In fact, Milman assures us that the idea of inspiration generally received in the early Christian ages was simply this, that the sacred writers were inspired with an inflexible love of truth. But however this may be, there can be no question that the general characteristics of the men, and the bias of the age in which they lived, are as noticeable in their writings as in those of other honest God-fearing men.

Admitting however, that Divine Providence, in view of the important place which these records were destined to occupy, may have specially ensured a sufficiently accurate knowledge of the events they describe, it is not necessary that anything more than the spiritual truths of the Bible—neither its science, nor its history, nor even its language—should be regarded as specially inspired.

We hold that the Bible is full of precious Revelations from God; in fact that it points out all that is needful for man's salvation: but the Bible is a depository of principles rather than of precise rules; and these must be studied, not blindly or superficially, but with discrimination and Divine enlightenment. We can accept

the words of an eminent Scotch divine who says, "If we find even in the Bible anything that confuses our sense of right or wrong, that seems to us less exalted and pure than the character of God should be; if after the most patient thought and prayerful pondering it still maintains this aspect, then we are not to bow down to it as God's revelation to us, since it does not meet the need of the earlier and more sacred revelation He has given us in our own spirit and conscience, which testify of Him." This is in other words the doctrine proclaimed by the early Quakers, and for which they have been grievously abused. It is doubtless for the very purpose of stimulating our industry, and for drawing out our spiritual faculties, that even in the study of these sacred records, full scope is thus left for necessary and invigorating labour and thought.

Let us discuss this important point still further, that there may be no misconception of our meaning. We heartily accept the estimate which by universal consent of the Christian Churches, and with so much good reason, has been ever accorded to the spiritual revealings of Holy Scripture, as the authoritative written exposition of Divine truth. The deep and true insight into the things of God, so apparent in these writings, we cannot but attribute to an extraordinary degree of Divine inspiration—that is, to a special enlightenment of the understanding, and particularly to a spiritual perception of truth, which, to

the writers themselves, probably often carried with it an undoubted evidence of certainty.

But in recording and promulgating these Divine revealings of spiritual truth, they employed only the ordinary modes of communication—the language, for instance, commonly used amongst their countrymen, with all its vagueness and inexactness, and with all its intensely figurative and idiomatic character. Equally certain it is that the peculiar features of the mental and spiritual constitution of each writer are impressed upon and displayed in his writings. We do not find in the Bible itself any assumption of the infallibility which has been claimed for it in more modern times. On the contrary, we find the Apostles recording of themselves, and of one another, abundant evidence that they were men of like passions with all mankind, and were subject, even in their religious ministrations, to the ordinary conditions of human intercourse.

There were, then, in the composition of the Bible the imperfect media of language and illustration, the controlling influence of circumstance and of training, and the limited nature of the best human comprehension of the unseen mysteries. Add to this, that we most of us read these writings in a language of altogether different genius and structure, and under conditions of life and thought thoroughly dissimilar,—and what follows? Clearly this, that we are bound to use an intelligent and painstaking discrimination

in reading the Bible. We have access to the same Spirit which inspired the sacred writers—and it is our duty under this enlightening power to remodel, as it were, for ourselves, and to put into equivalents, rather of sense than of mere language, much of their highly figurative and intensely national expression; and then to look to it that we make no false inferences or incongruous applications.

It is of enormous value, and is probably a necessary condition of true and safe progress, that we who are “the heirs of all the ages” should have a written declaration of spiritual truth, the record of continuously widening Revelations from God. We do not doubt that many things have been written by “holy men” of modern time, who were also “moved by the Holy Ghost” to write them. But the eternal principles of truth are already recorded, and there is no necessity to “canonize” further writings, nor to disturb in any way the unique position occupied by the sacred Scriptures.

A more unlikely or unreasonable supposition could scarcely be hazarded than that a loving “Father of the spirits of all flesh” would never—through all the ages of the world—manifest Himself; never, in some special ways reveal Himself and His spiritual laws to His seeking children. And yet some people take offence at the Bible because it asserts that He did, in the earlier times, so reveal Himself, and because He has provided that mankind shall possess in the

vii A "Reasonable and Scriptural Faith"

viii/ Complaints about dogmatism of  
Congregational School.

xi/ Orgn. atheism

2/ CATHOLICISM — vs dogmatism

4/ Anti-dogmatism; anti-creed

7/ True religion must never contradict  
the intellectual knowledge

Bible not the sole light

12/ Centrality of holiness

19/ Bible a progressive revelation

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into perfect day! And though written by nearly fifty writers of every order and condition—separated from each other by intervals of long centuries, we recognise the same characteristic tone throughout; uniformly leaving on the mind an impression of the holiness of God, and of the responsibilities of men, which it is impossible to surpass." It begins, "In the beginning," and is carried forward under most varying circumstances, till it brings us to the narrative of that Gospel dispensation which it proclaims as the supreme Revelation of God and His purposes towards mankind. Thus it is not only in many respects a unique, but a full Revelation of the great principles of religious truth and duty.

But in other important respects the Bible is unique only in degree. Revelation, for instance, strictly speaking, is any communication of Divine light and know-

ledge to men; and inspiration is the ordinary direct means of that communication: the Bible is simply the *greatest* outward or instrumental means. That large portion of it which is simply historical or narrative, we receive as substantially true,—for the most part as we do other history, on account of the trustworthiness of the men who wrote it, without supposing that all their knowledge of events was necessarily inspired.

As regards what they tell us about spiritual truth, we have repeatedly admitted that *their perception* of it was the result of a direct Divine inspiration or intuition. But we do not in all cases find it easy to assure ourselves that the identical impression and the real spiritual teaching which they received are transferred by the record to our own understandings. This is not surprising, considering that we are listening to men of a remote age, whose circumstances and national idiosyncracies were strangely different from our own; who habitually used symbolical and other illustrations which were interwoven with the religious institutions and with all the thoughts and habits of their contemporaries; which were, in fact, as necessary for them, as they are sometimes obscure and inapplicable (and so, perhaps, even apt to be misleading) to us. As we have before observed, they used a language which had absolutely none of the definiteness and precision of our own. The surprising verbal *inexactness* of many of the quotations from the Old Testament to



be met with in the New, is ample proof that the sacred writers set no store whatever on that preciseness and accuracy of thought and expression which modern and western nations so assiduously cultivate.

It is also of the utmost importance to bear in mind, that the Bible is an account of a *progressive* development, an adaptation of religious truth to the slowly growing capacity of the human race. The unfolding of the wisdom and moral righteousness of God was given only as men were able to appreciate and apply it. Dr. Arnold says truly that "it is impossible rightly to comprehend Scripture if we read it as we read the Koran, as though it were in all its parts of equal authority, all composed at one time, and all addressed to persons similarly situated."

Then, if we grasp this thought thoroughly, we shall understand that the earlier writers of the Bible said many things which were only appropriate to an obviously immature state of spiritual development. Such must be regarded as simply dim outlines, incomplete sketches of religious truth, adapted to the capacity of the age. Some of these outlines were specially alluded to, and the details filled up by our Lord.

Thus, whilst conceding to the "holy men" of the early time a supreme place as lights in their day, we shall not understand all their experiences or utterances as necessarily ultimate or perfect conceptions. We shall not give to every detached passage in the Bible the same significance and value *as if it stood alone* :

or as though the whole collection of writings were a contemporaneous description by one hand, of *a fixed state of things*.

No doubt, as average human intelligence and freedom from hierarchical imposition and from dogmatic restraint advance, the whole conditions under which the Bible was written, the human element which it undoubtedly contains, the special adaptation of its parts to their local and temporary uses, and the progressive character of the Divine teaching exhibited in its pages will be more and more recognised and understood: and as a result, its exceeding beauty and religious value will be far more widely appreciated.

Our aim in this paper has been to point out the true character of the Bible, that it may be loved and honoured for what it really is. We have spoken of it again and again as a record of a *progressive* Revelation, and have shown that what is progressive is necessarily imperfect in its earlier stages. That whilst characterised all through by a wonderful unity of progressive purpose, as we should expect a record of Divine revelations to the human race would be, the Bible is not one book, but many books, and that these are not all on a level, not all of equal illumination, and therefore not all of equal religious value to us. That though commonly called the Word of God, and sometimes the Words of God, it nevertheless contains many distinctly human words, and that to ignore this is to injure and falsify the record. At the same time we



have sought to show that this marvellous collection of writings is a rich storehouse of true revelations, a veritable mine of Divine truth.

It has been well said that "we shall find in Scripture not hewn stone for building up dogmatic systems, but teeming principles, as vital and fecund as ever, which can quicken new systems of thought and aid in the solution of new social problems."

We cannot do better than refer, in conclusion, to the words of Christ to the Jews, on this special subject. "Ye search the Scriptures," said He, "because in them ye think ye have eternal life, and these are they that testify of me, and ye will not come to *me*, that ye may have life." Here we have the supreme object of the Scriptures, even of the Old Testament, clearly indicated. They were to prepare the way for, and to testify of God's great and unique revelation of Himself, and of the things of His kingdom, in Jesus Christ. Having themselves no power to impart spiritual life, they point to Him—the ever-living Christ—as the true Source of that life; He and not the Bible (as the Book itself tells us) is "THE WORD OF GOD."

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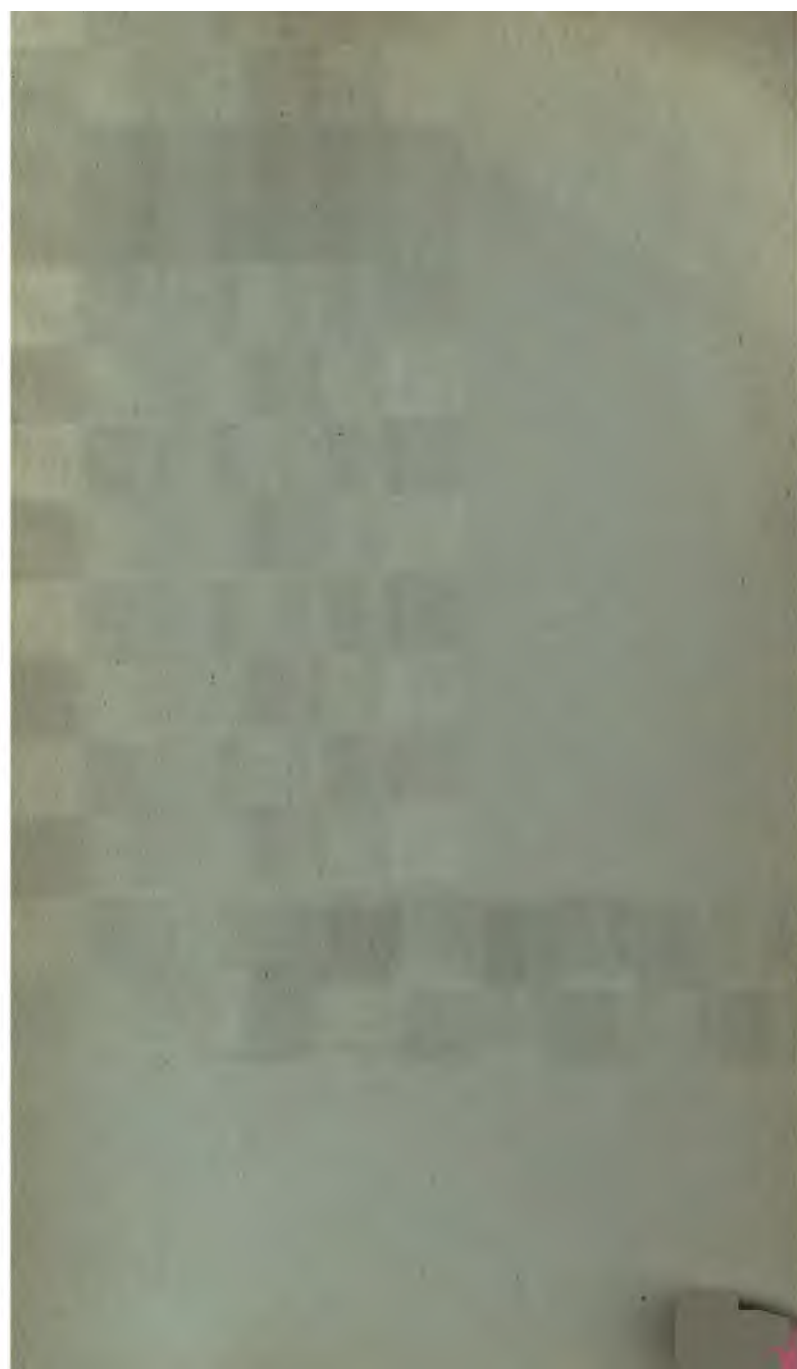
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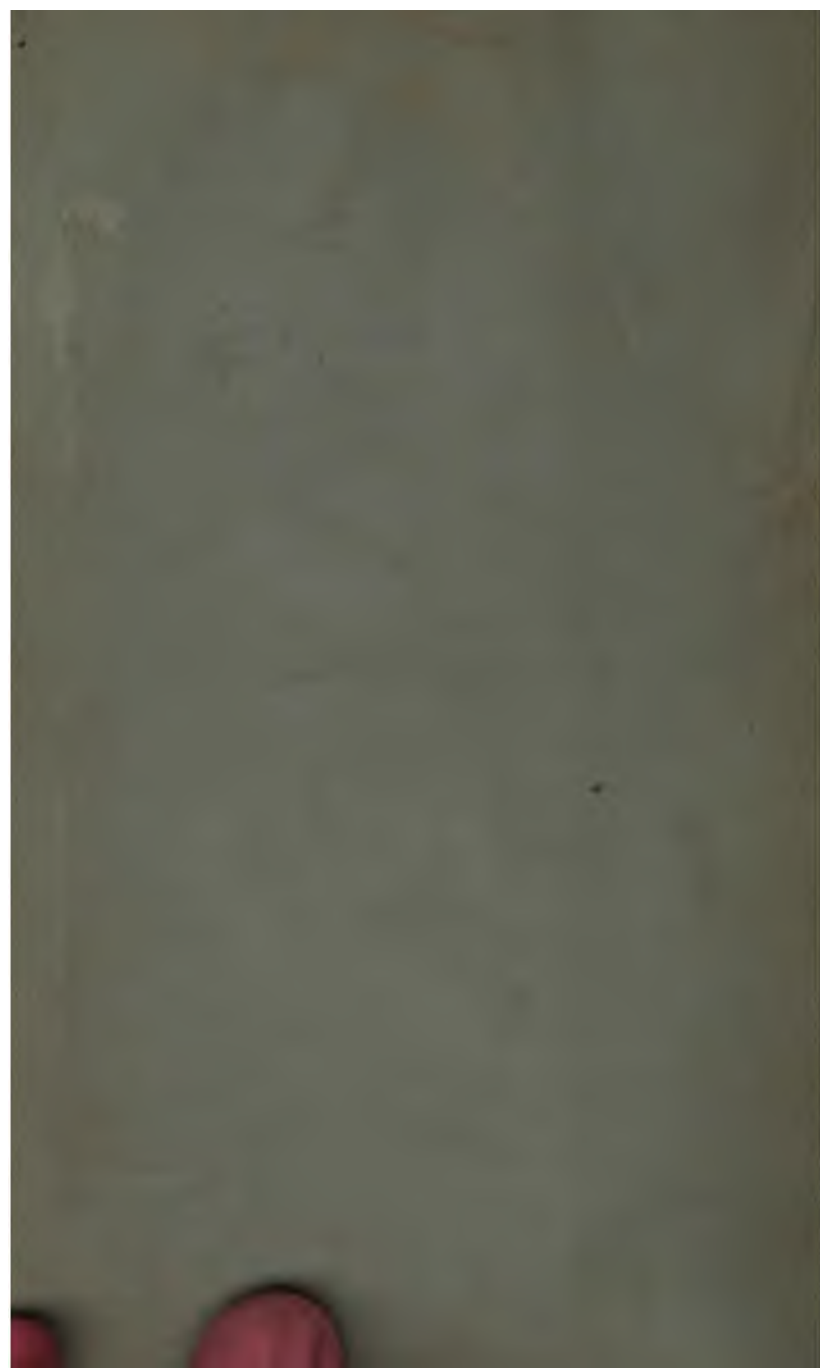
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